



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 1 AUG 2022

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HEADLINE	07/31 Missed chance stop monkeypox endemic?
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/it-may-be-too-late-to-stop-monkeypox-becoming-endemic-in-the-u-s-and-europe/ar-AA10a63d
GIST	<p>We failed to get on top of the monkeypox outbreak and we may have missed the chance to stop the disease becoming endemic—and a permanent threat—in the U.S. and Europe.</p> <p>Monkeypox is spreading fast all over the world, especially in the United States and Europe. With cases doubling every two weeks or so, there's a growing risk that monkeypox will become a permanent problem in countries where, before, outbreaks were rare and small.</p> <p>The pox is, in other words, close to becoming endemic in a lot of new places. If that happens, it might become very difficult to eradicate. Monkeypox, which causes a fever and rash and is fatal in a very small number of cases, will become yet another disease that people have to worry about all the time.</p> <p>For the pox, there are two paths to endemicity. If the virus infects enough people fast enough to outpace authorities' efforts to trace transmission and vaccinate at-risk individuals, it might become endemic in people. "We are getting close to this already," James Lawler, an infectious disease expert at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>The good news with this kind of endemicity is that it doesn't <i>have</i> to be permanent. Reversing human endemicity is hard, yes—but it's possible. "If it's just spreading in humans it can be controlled—eventually—through vaccination and natural immunity," Amesh Adalja, a public-health expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>But monkeypox was originally a "zoonotic" animal virus. It circulates in rodent and monkey species in West and Central Africa, where outbreaks in the human population are frequent.</p> <p>If the pox finds a home in some animal species in North America or Europe—say, squirrels, rats or prairie dogs—it'll be all but impossible to eradicate regionally. "Game over," Lawler said. The pox will be all around us, probably forever, just waiting for opportunities to spread from animals to people. Outbreaks will be frequent and big, just like they are now in West and Central Africa.</p> <p>To be clear, the pox is not endemic in people or animals in the United States or Europe—yet. But the trends aren't encouraging. "I do share the other scientists' concern of containment and the virus becoming endemic in our U.S. rodent population," Stephanie James, the head of a viral testing lab at Regis University in Colorado, told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>Officials first noticed the current outbreak, involving a relatively mild West African strain of the pox, after diagnosing a U.K. traveler returning from Nigeria in early May. Spreading through close physical contact including sex, the pox soon accompanied travelers on planes heading for countries far and wide. Doctors diagnosed the first U.S. case on May 27.</p> <p>But it's apparent now that the first <i>diagnosed</i> pox cases in Europe and the U.S. weren't the real first cases. On June 3, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced it had found genetic evidence of American pox cases that predated the first cases in Europe from May.</p> <p>Doctors may not have noticed or reported these earlier infections, at first, owing to the similarity between pox symptoms and the symptoms of some common sexually-transmitted diseases such as herpes. "The virus was masquerading as a sexually transmitted infection and had been spreading clandestinely for several months," Adalja explained.</p>

The virus had a big head start, which helps to explain why, months later, it's still staying ahead of intensifying efforts to contain it. There were 20,638 confirmed cases in 77 countries as of Wednesday, [according to the CDC](#). That's up from fewer than 10,000 cases two weeks ago. The World Health Organization has counted five pox-related deaths in non-endemic countries.

What's frustrating to epidemiologists is that, in theory, we had all the tools we needed to swiftly contain a pox outbreak. Thanks to COVID, health workers all over the world are better than ever at contact-tracing. Vaccines and therapies that work for smallpox also work for monkeypox. There's a proven strategy: diagnose cases, isolate and treat the infected, vaccinate their family, friends and co-workers.

And educate the public—especially the highest-risk groups including men who have sex with men.

But so far, the strategy isn't working. Part of the problem is with the virus itself, Lawler said. "The disease is different than the monkeypox we have seen in the past. I don't think we know why—probably a combo of virus, hosts and environment."

Mostly, it's our fault. Too many doctors misdiagnosed pox cases as herpes or some other STD. The WHO and the CDC both waited too long to designate the pox outbreak as a public-health emergency and mobilize resources. The WHO declared an emergency on July 23. The CDC is expected to do the same in the next few days.

Authorities are deploying more vaccines and therapies and boosting testing. Even so, the clinics that are on the public-health front line in the U.S. need more of everything. More tests. [More vaccines and therapies](#). More money for community outreach. The U.S. National Coalition of STD Directors [recently surveyed a hundred clinics](#) and found that half lacked the capacity to deal with the monkeypox outbreak.

"We are still going too slowly," Lawler warned. And, he added, "we are still dismissing the possibility of the unexpected." Including the increasing likelihood of the pox spreading to squirrels or rats.

The feds seem to be at a loss to deal with "reverse zoonotic" people-to-animal transmission. To prevent endemicity in animals, you have to detect pox infections in a species, cull the infected animals then closely monitor the remaining population to be sure you eliminated all the virus.

But it's not clear who in the federal health establishment should take the lead. "Operational zoonotic disease response falls in this gray area," Lawler said. The CDC [maintains a website](#) describing pox symptoms in pets and livestock and explaining where to send samples for diagnosis. The Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service monitors disease in animals. Especially livestock.

APHIS couldn't, or wouldn't, confirm it's testing animals for monkeypox. The agency referred The Daily Beast to the CDC, which did not respond to an email seeking comment. If there's a lead agency for detecting pox in animals, that agency doesn't seem eager to take responsibility.

Monkeypox's rapid spread in people is a preventable tragedy. But it can still get a *lot* worse. With hard work and a little luck, it's still possible to contain and eventually eliminate the human outbreak.

But if American or European rodents catch the pox, the outbreak will escalate into something much worse. A newly endemic disease. One that's all but impossible to eradicate.

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HEADLINE	08/01 Most public schools keep masks optional
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/01/health/schools-covid-masking-fall-2022/index.html
GIST	(CNN)Students are heading to another school year amid the Covid-19 pandemic, but this time, there seem to be fewer discussions and fretting about masks and other mitigation measures -- despite a rise of infections sweeping the country.

Most of the largest public school districts in the United States are not requiring masks for the new school year, [making masking "optional"](#) as students return to classes and the highly transmissible BA.5 subvariant spreads.

Across the country, "schools have become more relaxed in their mask policies," said Gladys Cruz, president-elect of the [School Superintendents Association](#) and district superintendent for [Questar III](#) in New York.

Although there is the possibility that such policies could change if Covid-19 case rates rise or fall, everyone in a district might not be receptive to change, Cruz said.

"The possibility of mandating masks is there, in case of a surge, but I would have to say that it's going to be much more difficult to implement that mask mandate if it came down to that because we have been without masks now for long periods," said Cruz, whose district starts school in early September.

In its [guidance for schools](#), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends universal indoor masking in K-12 schools and early education programs that are located in counties with a high Covid-19 community level.

Almost half -- 45.8% -- of US counties are at high Covid-19 community levels, [according to CDC data](#). Among the top 500 K-12 school districts, based on enrollment, in the United States, about 98% do not require masks, according to [the data company Burbio's school policy tracker](#).

Many of the nation's largest school systems -- including Los Angeles Unified, City of Chicago, Miami-Dade County and Clark County in Nevada -- start school in August.

Meanwhile, Covid-19 cases are rising across the United States once again, driven by the [Omicron subvariant BA.5](#), the most transmissible strain of the coronavirus yet. More than 14 million children have tested positive for Covid-19 since the onset of the pandemic, according to available state reports; more than 311,000 of these cases have been added in the past four weeks, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) reported last week.

Millions of children will be returning to school in the coming days and weeks unvaccinated. A [CNN analysis](#) finds that less than half of children and teens, ages 5 to 17, are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, and only a tenth have been boosted.

'Working to live with this virus'

In some communities, such as those in New York state, classes are not scheduled to start until early September -- and school officials are waiting for updates from their local health departments regarding the Covid-19 mitigation measures to implement this upcoming school year. Many school districts continue to disinfect surfaces and explore upgrading ventilation systems.

"Many schools will continue with some mitigation strategies this fall; such as, cleaning and disinfection, upgrades to HVAC systems. Masks will be optional," Randall W. Squier, superintendent of schools for Cossackie-Athens Central School District in New York, wrote in an email to CNN on Tuesday.

"Schools are still struggling with whether to offer a remote learning option for students. If COVID-19 cases surge we would follow any recommendations or mandates from our state department of health," he wrote.

When it comes to masking, "absent any specific state mask mandate, most superintendents will work with their county health departments to establish guidelines for optional mask wearing," Squier wrote in his email. "Superintendents attempt to establish a regional approach to any pandemic guidelines to avoid confusion among our families and employees who may work and live in neighboring counties."

As mask-wearing has become optional in most schools, Squier wrote that he has noticed tension around masks among parents and staff calm down in his region.

"Since New York State lifted the mask mandate in March, there has been no movement by school districts to reintroduce a mask mandate," he wrote. "The political rhetoric at school board meetings regarding mask mandates has settled down since the mandate was lifted."

Community tension around masking "has dissipated," said Daniel Bittman, superintendent for Independent School District 728 in Minnesota.

For Bittman's district, which starts its new school year after Labor Day, masks will be optional but recommended for the students across its five different counties.

"We will not require masks for this particular school year," Bittman told CNN.

"Masking in our particular district is always recommended, particularly if cases are added at a point that we consider we consider to be critical. At this point, the number of cases are significantly low," he said. "So, we're working closely with our Department of Education as well as our Department of Health to monitor that and so we will not be requiring them at this time."

Bittman added that if there were a surge in cases, there could be mask requirements in a particular school or classroom, but not on a district-wide basis.

In many districts, Cruz, of the School Superintendents Association said, superintendents and school boards are in constant consultation with their local health departments in developing Covid-19 mitigation measures and policies -- something that might become an ongoing part of living with Covid-19 and other infectious diseases in the future.

"We're definitely working hand in hand. Schools and governments are really working to live with this virus and figure out how we can continue to keep schools open for students," Cruz said. "I think we're now in a place where we're learning and working to live with it."

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HEADLINE	08/01 Myanmar leader extends state emergency
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/myanmar-leader-announces-extension-state-emergency-87735800
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- The leader of Myanmar's military-installed government on Monday announced the extension of its mandate to rule for another six months in preparation for an election it has said will be held next year.</p> <p>The army seized power on Feb. 1 last year from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. It cited alleged fraud in the November 2020 general election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party had won in a landslide while the military-backed party did poorly.</p> <p>Independent election observers said they found no evidence of substantive irregularities, and the army takeover was met with widespread non-violent protests around the country. Security forces used deadly force to disperse them, prompting armed resistance by the pro-democracy forces. The escalation of violence has since plunged Myanmar into what U.N. experts have described as a civil war.</p> <p>Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, head of the ruling State Administration Council, said in a broadcast speech Monday that the state of emergency declared after last year's takeover was extended because time was needed to prepare for new elections, or as the official announcement of the extension said, "to continue working to return the country to the path of a peaceful and disciplined multiparty democratic system and to hold multiparty democratic general elections."</p>

	<p>The military originally declared that new polls would be held a year after its takeover, but later said they would take place in 2023. There is considerable doubt they will be free and fair, because most of the leaders of Suu Kyi's party have been locked up, and there is a large chance the party itself will be dissolved by the pro-military courts.</p> <p>Min Aung Hlaing said the military had tried its "utmost to discharge (its) responsibilities" since it seized power.</p> <p>"However, terrorists based inside and outside the country and the people and organizations supporting them are committed to the utter devastation of Myanmar, instead of trying to nurture democracy in Myanmar," he said.</p> <p>While some opponents of military rule have employed tactics including assassinations and bombings, the military dubs almost all those opposing it as "terrorists."</p> <p>U.N. experts and rights groups are more critical of government repression, which is reliably reported to include arbitrary arrests and killings, torture, and military sweeps that include air attacks and the burning down of entire villages.</p> <p>"To ensure that there is no unfairness, threats or coercion in the coming election, armed conflicts must cease," said Min Aung Hlaing, in what appeared to be a reference to the government's ongoing military operations, which are carried out against ethnic minority groups as well as pro-democracy forces and their supporters.</p> <p>"To be able to hold the elections, we will accelerate the efforts by our public security system to stabilize the politics and security of the nation," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Long-haulers warn: take Covid-19 seriously
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/a-very-lonely-place-to-be-take-covid-seriously-long-haulers-warn%ef%bf%bc/
GIST	<p><i>Orlando Sentinel</i> ORLANDO, Fla. — On the rare occasions when Vero Beach resident Neil Passmore goes out in public, he's often the only one in a mask.</p> <p>When Passmore caught COVID-19 in June 2020, the virus hit him hard: He shook with chills, struggled to breathe, his heart raced and he had trouble regulating his body temperature. He also experienced disassociation and memory loss, among other symptoms.</p> <p>In the weeks and months after his infection, he noticed some symptoms weren't going away, and some were getting worse. After five weeks, he was often confused, stuttering and calling things by the wrong name: mailboxes became post offices, coconuts became pine cones, palm trees became pine trees.</p> <p>Doctors eventually discovered optic nerve and brainstem damage.</p> <p>His second round of COVID-19 in August 2021 made all his symptoms worse, particularly his cardiac symptoms.</p> <p>More than two years later, he still struggles with regulating his body temperature, a rapid heartbeat, tinnitus, dizziness and neurological symptoms. His ongoing cognitive issues make it impossible to return to his job as a Walgreens pharmacist. He's terrified of getting COVID-19 again.</p> <p>"I went from having a very good job, living like you're supposed to, working hard... for months and months, helping sick people every day," he said. "Then I get sick, and bam! That's it. You don't know... if you're going to be able to keep your house and your vehicles. Your way of life has definitely changed."</p>

Passmore has long COVID, known also as long-haul COVID-19, or Post COVID condition.

The CDC estimates [as many as one in five adults](#) who catch COVID-19 may go on to develop long COVID, defined by the [World Health Organization](#) as symptoms in people previously infected that last for at least two months and cannot be attributed to anything else. Common symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath and cognitive dysfunction but the range is broad.

Now, as new, ultra-infectious subvariants of the COVID-19 omicron variant drive up COVID-19 cases, advocates say it is more important than ever to speed up awareness and research the origins and treatment for the condition.

“If in the future a significant portion of the population is suffering from COVID and long-haul COVID simultaneously, this will be an extraordinary burden financially for everyone,” said Elena Cyrus, an infectious disease epidemiologist and assistant professor at the University of Central Florida.

More questions than answers

An estimated 1.5 million adults in Florida are currently experiencing symptoms of long COVID-19, based on a [summer 2022 household pulse survey](#) and [2020 population estimates](#) by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Other viruses can also cause symptoms that stick around after people recover, varying in severity or duration, Cyrus said.

“The only difference is that because of the scale of COVID, we are looking closer at it, because of the massive impact it can have,” she wrote in an email.

Two years in, there are still more questions than answers as to the disease’s origins: Could tiny blood clots be cutting off blood flow to some parts of the body? Does the coronavirus sometimes stick around in certain areas? Could COVID make some people’s immune systems go haywire, causing chronic inflammation? Those are three leading theories, researchers told Science Magazine [in a June article](#). In all likelihood, there is no single cause, but rather multiple factors working together.

There are no go-to proven treatments, either, said Dr. Irene Estores, who opened the UF Health COVID RESTORE (rehabilitation, support, training, outreach and research) Treatment Program in Gainesville in July 2021. This is among the [post-COVID care centers listed by the Survivors Corp](#), a grassroots patient advocacy effort. (Washington state has options included in the list.)

Estores tries treatments that are meant for conditions with similar symptoms.

She points out long COVID research is moving forward, albeit slowly.

“We know more about long COVID — both mechanisms and treatments — now than we did two years ago. So, we just keep on working,” Estores said.

She has a long waitlist. Seeing patients is time-consuming, as is helping them apply for disability insurance benefits.

“Patients need to recognize that we do want to help, but physicians need resources to be able to help,” Estores said. “It will take more than just commitment from physicians ... This requires a concerted effort from health systems and from the government.”

The National Institutes of Health in February 2021 announced a \$1.15 billion initiative, RECOVER, to fund investigations into the condition, though since then the initiative has faced criticism for its slow speed and lack of transparency, a [June Science Magazine article reports](#).

Many of Estores' patients have made progress, and she emphasizes this. But she acknowledges that it can be easy to give up.

"I can understand why... they feel this way. My patients tell me how hard it is. And I can see it," Estores said. "... I can tell you that my patients who continue to work with me on this, we go somewhere."

Terrified of reinfection

Faced with chronic, often unexplainable symptoms and no proven treatments, having long COVID-19 can feel hopeless, said Danielle Jordan, 21, from Coral Gables.

Jordan caught COVID-19 as a healthy 19-year-old. She couldn't walk without pain, accurately taste or smell, or regulate her rapid heartbeat in the three months that followed. Though many symptoms faded, she still suffers from parosmia and dysgeusia: distorted smell and taste.

Jordan's mental state is in recovery, too.

"What I wish people knew about long covid was the effects it can have on one's mental health. It is a very lonely place to be in if no one around you is going through what you are going through," Jordan wrote in an email. "... It's been horrible."

When the University of Miami student was exposed to the virus again in September 2021, she had panic attacks multiple times a day out of fear she'd test positive again.

Brian Hartin, who suffered from lack of energy, brain fog and depression, says he is about 80% recovered from long COVID after about two years. He's working again, though in a lower position than he was before because his health is still unpredictable.

The 37-year-old Lakeland resident, like Jordan, is desperate to get better and scared of catching COVID again.

Their fears aren't unfounded.

Saint Louis Health Care System researchers found that each time a person catches COVID-19, their risk of new health problems may increase, a [draft study of over 5.6 million people](#) said. It is currently awaiting peer review.

Others have moved on

Hartin doesn't sense the same concern he has about COVID-19 in others, however.

A couple of weeks ago, he heard his coworkers joking that they were so burnt out, they wanted to catch COVID just as an excuse to take time off.

"I was like, really? You don't want to have what happened to me happen to you, and you're talking about it just so casually," Hartin said.

Doctors, too, have dismissed Hartin because there's no clear cause for his symptoms.

"There's only so many times that you can go to the doctor or go to the ER and they tell you that everything's all right, you know, and that there's nothing wrong with you, and obviously that's not true, because I wouldn't feel the way that I feel if there wasn't something wrong," he said.

Some doubt long COVID's existence. Jeremy Devine, a resident psychiatrist at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, wrote [a Wall Street Journal op-ed suggesting](#) long COVID-19 can be explained in most cases by underlying mental health issues.

Florida Department of Health spokesperson Jeremy Redfern tweeted, [“long COVID = anxiety”](#) from his personal account to the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis in June.

Both faced swift backlash from physicians, psychiatrists, other mental health professionals and activists. Passmore says for their sakes and his, he hopes the general public takes long COVID and the current wave seriously.

“Maybe the new variants aren’t killing as many people, but there’s still a lot of risks with them,” he said.

Resources are growing

In the meantime, for those already struggling, there are resources, many of them established by long COVID-19 patients themselves.

Estores’ program [is accepting new patients](#), who can call 352-265-9355 and specify they’re looking for long COVID-19 treatment. She said patients should expect a waitlist at her clinic and others.

Other post-COVID-19 care centers and contact information can be found on the website of [Survivors Corps](#), a grassroots patient advocacy effort.

Support groups have also sprung up, such as [COVID-19 Long Haulers Support](#) on Facebook.

The [Patient-Led Research Collaborative](#), a group of researchers with long COVID-19, has resources as well.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Fires engulf western Nebraska wildfire area
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/07/31/nebraska-fires-evacuation/
GIST	<p>Emergency responders and law enforcement officials in Nebraska’s Scotts Bluff County urged residents to evacuate as they worked to contain a large fire engulfing a state wildlife management area in the western county.</p> <p>The wildfire began in four separate sites in the Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area late Saturday, the region’s emergency management director, Tim Newman, told the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. The likely cause was lighting, but it was too early to confirm, he said.</p> <p>Videos and photos circulating on social media appeared to show the sky covered in thick plumes of red smoke, as bales of hay burned on the side of a road south of Gering, the county seat.</p> <p>Capt. Kurt von Minden, of the Nebraska State Patrol troop for Scotts Bluff, told The Washington Post shortly after 7 a.m. local time on Sunday that the rugged terrain around the wildlife area was impeding efforts to contain the fire.</p> <p>Firefighters were struggling to control flames burning inside canyons, he said, and planes were expected to help put out the fire with chemicals or water.</p> <p>The area is sparsely populated, and no one had died or been injured due to the fire as of early Sunday, von Minden said — though the flames had destroyed several homes.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials urged residents along a roughly 16-mile stretch of road encompassing small towns such as Gering and Terrytown to evacuate late Saturday. Officials were also evacuating livestock.</p> <p>A sergeant with the Nebraska State Patrol said on Twitter: “Evacuations of area residents are underway. Multiple fire departments and law enforcement agencies are on scene, monitoring the fire and providing traffic control.”</p>

Newman, the regional emergency director, told the Star-Herald that he did not yet know how large the fire was, but that some 1,000 acres of land had burned at just one of the four sites where it is thought to have started.

On Saturday, a single-engine air tanker, or SEAT, plane had reportedly been deployed to the site of the fire and made several drops — typically of water or fire retardant — before being grounded for the evening.

Officials including Newman were working early Sunday out of an old school building near the Cedar Canyon Wildlife Management Area to decide how best to [battle the fire](#), the Nebraska patrol sergeant said. “Daylight will bring more fire fighting options, such as air support, which will get water to fires burning on rough terrain that cannot be reached by trucks,” the sergeant [tweeted](#).

Farther west, at the border between Oregon and California, a large wildfire known as the McKinney Fire was spreading rapidly over the weekend, unleashing thunderstorms.

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HEADLINE	08/01 Covid contagious period for isolation
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/08/01/covid-contagious-period-isolation/
GIST	<p>You’ve got covid-19. When can you exit isolation? If you do resume activities outside your home, can you be sure you’re no longer contagious?</p> <p>It’s complicated. Be forewarned: Guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are nuanced but a little confusing.</p> <p>Those guidelines are under review and may change. Several infectious-disease experts said they believe patients with covid should have a negative antigen test — which gives results within minutes — before exiting isolation. The CDC currently leaves that as an option and does not explicitly recommend it.</p> <p>The important thing to consider, experts say, is that every person and every case of covid is unique. There is no hard-and-fast rule for how sick a person will get or how long a person remains infectious. The guidelines offer a general framework, but patients should take into account their different circumstances, priorities and resources to assess risk.</p> <p>How long should I isolate if I have covid?</p> <p>The coronavirus has the tricky feature of being transmissible even before the infected person has symptoms. In general, the peak period of virus shedding starts about a day or two before symptoms appear and continues two or three days after.</p> <p>Even though a person is less likely to transmit the virus later in the course of illness, it’s still possible. Research shows that people continue to shed virus that can be cultured in a laboratory — a good test of the potential to pass along the virus — for about eight days on average after testing positive.</p> <p>Experts say it is very unlikely to pass along the virus after 10 days even if a person still is testing positive.</p> <p>The CDC calls for patients to isolate for at least five days. On Day 6, you can end isolation as long as your symptoms have improved and you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without taking fever-reducing medicine. CDC has a calculator on its isolation and quarantine webpage to help people figure this out.</p> <p>A potentially confusing point: Day 1 of your isolation, according to the CDC, is the day <i>after</i> you start feeling symptoms or test positive. (So, if you have a sore throat on Monday afternoon, that is Day 0 and Tuesday is Day 1.)</p> <p>Even if you test negative, wear a well-fitting mask through Day 10 if you must be around others at home or in public. Don’t travel.</p>

If you decide to take a rapid at-home test several days into your infection, the best approach is to use it toward the end of the five-day period, CDC says.

If it is positive after the five-day isolation period, you should continue to isolate for a full 10 days, according to the agency guidelines.

Wait. Shouldn't I test negative on a rapid test before leaving isolation?

The CDC guidance on this is confusing. It does not explicitly recommend that you take a negative test to end isolation.

But many experts think [rapid at-home tests](#), also known as antigen tests, should be used to exit isolation.

That's what happened with President Biden, who [tested negative twice](#) before leaving isolation. (Biden, who was taking the antiviral Paxlovid, experienced a 'rebound' infection, [testing positive](#) Saturday, and went back into isolation.) Also, experts point out that rapid tests are more readily available than last December, when [CDC released this guidance](#).

"Given that a substantial portion of people do have a rapid positive test after 5 days, I think an updated recommendation should include people having a negative rapid test before coming out of isolation for COVID," Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said in an email. He was the Biden administration's senior adviser on testing from December until April.

"A negative antigen test is fairly reassuring that you are not able to transmit infection to other people anymore," said Amy Barczak, an infectious-diseases expert at Massachusetts General Hospital who has researched how long patients with covid can shed virus. In a recent study published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), she and colleagues found that, on average, people infected with the omicron variant of the virus can shed virus that can be grown in a lab for eight days.

Should I repeat the rapid test if it is negative?

Barczak says for healthy people, if you test negative on a rapid antigen test on or after Day 5, "you are unlikely to be contagious to other people."

For people with special concerns about passing along the virus, an extra test is not a bad idea. In symptomatic people, clinicians sometimes recommend a second rapid test to be sure. Biden, for example, tested negative Tuesday evening, and again Wednesday morning, before leaving isolation.

Michael Mina, a former Harvard University infectious-disease epidemiologist and immunologist who is an expert on rapid tests, said two tests 24 hours apart might provide extra security, like a double lock on your door. If people have access to tests, then "two tests in a row is just better form, better protection, than one negative test."

When should you take a PCR test vs. a rapid at-home test?

PCR tests, a type of molecular test, look for the virus's genetic material. They can detect even the tiniest amounts of virus, before you have enough in your body to spread it to other people. They are more useful early on as a confirmatory test to see if you are sick with covid but are not useful to determine whether you are infectious to others, said Albert Ko, an epidemiologist and infectious-diseases physician at Yale University.

If you develop covid-like symptoms, CDC recommends that you get tested immediately. A negative PCR test in a symptomatic person means it's highly unlikely you have covid.

If you had close contact with someone with covid and then tested negative with a rapid test, you might want to get further assurance that you aren't infected. In that case, you can take a PCR test, Ko said. Most PCR tests must be analyzed by a lab, and results can take a few days.

	<p>A PCR test after you've been sick is not really practical, because "for the average healthy person, the PCR test is going to stay positive for longer than they're actually infectious," Barczak says.</p> <p>Rapid antigen tests are more practical than PCR tests for determining quickly whether you are capable of transmitting the virus. If you're symptomatic, an antigen test will be more reliable, because your body is putting out a lot more virus to detect. But even without symptoms, people can test positive on a rapid antigen test and be a risk to others. Most at-home tests provide results in 10 to 15 minutes using samples collected with a nasal swab.</p> <p>Because rapid tests provide results quickly and are essentially contagiousness tests, people should use them — even if they feel fine and have no symptoms — right before they plan to attend indoor events or large gatherings, especially if they expect to be around people more vulnerable to covid, including those with weak immune systems or others at higher risk of getting infected.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Japan most Covid cases in world
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/07/31/world-covid-19-japan-most-weekly-record-233100-daily/2501659275156/
GIST	<p>July 31 (UPI) -- Japan reported one-fifth of the world's COVID-19 cases in the past week, including a record 233,100 Thursday, as infections dropped 12% and deaths 7% globally.</p> <p>On Sunday, Japan announced 197,792 infections for a total of 12,796,261 in 12th place. Deaths were 82 for a total of 32,626 in 30th. Japan surpassed 200,000 for the first time the previous week.</p> <p>In the past week, Japan added a world-high 1,358,248 infections, a 54% percent gain.</p> <p>As the BA.5 Omicron subvariant spreads worldwide, infections dropped to 6,216,102 with a daily average of 888,015 and passing 1 million the last time on April 13, according to tracking by Worldometers.info. On Jan. 21, the daily record was set at 3,842,371. The total is 581,999,281, including 671,131 Saturday when Japan added 221,938.</p> <p>Fatalities in the past week were down to 13,912. That daily average is 1,987 with the recent low 1,235 on July 4, the lowest since 1,075 on March 21, 2020, 10 days after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The total is 6,419,772, including 857 Sunday and 1,252 Saturday. It was last under 1,000 on June 19 with 908.</p> <p>Some nations do not report data on weekends. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention doesn't report data on Saturdays and Sundays.</p> <p>Other case increases in the past week with more than 25,000 in descending order were South Korea 31% with 556,281 in third, Russia 65% with 64,489, Iran 33% with 61,977, Romania 39% with 56,906, Serbia 49% with 38,284.</p> <p>The United States reported the second most cases, 709,166 but a 23% drop, No. 4 Germany at 522,181 with an 18% decline, No. 5 Italy at 393,916 with a 26% decrease, No. 6 France 345,810 with a 36% drop, No. 7 Australia 312,056 with a 5% decrease.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Iran threatens to 'build nuclear warheads'
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/iran-nuclear-weapons/2022/07/31/id/1081134/
GIST	Amid stalled Biden administration talks to rework the decertified Obama-era Iran nuclear deal, Iran is coming out to threats to "build nuclear warheads" and turning New York City into "hellish ruins."

Social media video posts from an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have translated the threat "to produce atomic warheads for missiles" in a short amount of time "if the U.S. or the Zionist regime make any stupid mistakes," with the capability of "turning New York into hellish ruins," The Jerusalem Post reported Sunday.

The posts cited the IRGC Telegram post that declared: "Iran can immediately return to Emad project and build an atomic bomb if Natanz facilities are attacked."

The Emad is the long-range Iranian missile, The Post reported.

The video sharing the threats was titled, "When Will Iran's Sleeping Nuclear Warheads Awaken," according to reports.

The video published by the IRGC, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, noted a similar nuclear program depicted fictionally — but without direct reference to Iran — in this summer's "Top Gun Maverick" movie.

"The nuclear facilities of Fordow have been built deep under mountains of Iran and are protected against trench-busting bombs and even nuclear explosion," the video said, according to the translation.

"All infrastructures required for nuclear breakout have been prepared in it."

Much like the plot of the American movie, the video paraphrased that "the facilities at Natanz may be highly vulnerable to a possible attack by Western powers and Israel, but Fordow will immediately assume war footing and begin the nuclear breakout project within a short time if Natanz comes under missile attack."

The video was directly translated to vow to move Iran's "peaceful nuclear program to a nuclear weapons program" at an accelerated rate.

"They have all of the enriched materials they need," former President Donald Trump told young conservatives at the Turning Point Action Summit in Tampa, Florida, on July 23. "They can have nuclear weapons in a very short period of time. I'm talking about a matter of months or less.

"They might have one now."

Trump warned a nuclear Iran would change the world even more negatively than "radical left Democrats" have already done to "destroy our country."

"Once they have that, it's a whole different game," Trump warned of a nuclear Iran. "It's a terrible thing that's happened to our country. Our country has never been in a position like this.

"The election was stolen, it was rigged, and now our country is being destroyed, systematically destroyed."

Trump decertified the Obama-era Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action during his administration amid intelligence that suggested Iran was not abiding by the agreement in which former President Barack Obama reportedly paid Iran \$400 million to slow down their plan to become a world nuclear power.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Protesters in Sudan seek end military rule
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/31/africa/sudan-protests-military-rule-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	(CNN)Thousands of protesters rallied in the Sudanese capital Khartoum on Sunday calling for an end to military rule, following a CNN investigation that exposed Russia's plundering of gold in the African nation.

Clashes erupted after hundreds of demonstrators attempted to head to the Republican Palace -- Sudan's presidential offices -- but were met by police, who responded by firing tear gas at the protesters.

Video shows demonstrators chanting slogans against the military, which overthrew a transitional civilian government in 2021, delivering a devastating blow to the Sudanese pro-democracy movement that toppled President Omar al-Bashir two years earlier.

Authorities closed off the main Mek Nimr bridge, which connects downtown Khartoum and Khartoum North.

On Friday, Sudanese pro-democracy groups, including the influential "Revolutionary Committees," had called for a "million man march" to take place the following day.

The protests come after a CNN investigation uncovered evidence of a gold operation siphoning Sudanese wealth to Russia while evading US sanctions and run in collusion with the military leadership of Sudan.

The investigation, based on multiple interviews with high-level Sudanese and US officials and troves of documents reviewed by CNN, painted a picture of an elaborate Russian scheme to plunder Sudan's riches in a bid to fortify Russia against increasingly robust Western sanctions and to buttress Moscow's war effort in Ukraine.

Evidence seen by CNN also suggests that Russia colluded with Sudan's beleaguered military leadership, enabling billions of dollars in gold to bypass the Sudanese state and to deprive the poverty-stricken country of hundreds of millions in state revenue.

The investigation was shared widely in Sudan and caused public outcry. Hours after the report was broadcast, posts began circulating on WhatsApp and other social media platforms used by pro-democracy activists.

"The investigation conducted by CNN is hugely important to us. It looked into the crucial issue of the conflict over resources, especially important in a poor country like Sudan," Mohamed Al-Faki Suleiman, a leading Sudanese pro-democracy figure and former acting head of the civilian anti-corruption committee, told CNN.

"This is a result of the civil authority's lack of control over the security services, especially the police and security agencies, and therefore we were not able to impose our control over the smuggling process," Suleiman said.

On Saturday, the head of Sudan's national mining corporation Mubarak Ardol criticized the investigation on Twitter, calling it "weak and imprecise" and its numbers "exaggerated and imaginary."

CNN has reached out to Sudan's military rulers but has not received a response.

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HEADLINE	07/31 L.A. Co. govt jobs: citizenship not required
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/los-angeles-county-nixes-citizenship-requirement-government-jobs
GIST	<p>In the United States illegally? No problem. That is if you're looking for a government job in Los Angeles County.</p> <p>The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously with no discussion to allow the county to no longer require U.S. citizenship for government jobs.</p> <p>The policy includes exceptions for positions where U.S. citizenship is required by state and federal law. The motion was authored by Chair Hilda L. Solis, and co-authored by Sheila Kuehl. The vote took place last week.</p>

Those wishing to work for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, as well as any peace officers hired by the county, will still be subject to citizenship requirements.

According to the adopted motion, the new policy "ensures that applicants for employment are fairly and equitably considered, without regard to national origin, citizenship or other non-merit factors that are not substantially related to successful performance of the duties of the position," the Los Angeles Daily News reported.

Last year, the Board of Supervisors had asked the Office of the County Counsel and the Department of Human Resources for an analysis of whether scrapping citizenship requirements for board-appointed county officers or department heads was legal.

The report said the [citizenship requirement for workers](#) could be waived as long as state or federal law did not explicitly impose a requirement.

"Los Angeles County is a community of immigrants from each corner of the world," Solis wrote in a statement when the motion was introduced. "And while our County-government workforce reflects the community it represents, there is room for improvement. This motion seeks to make clear that the County, as one of the largest employers in the region, strives to be an inclusive and diverse workforce, and is committed to not excluding nor allowing citizenship to be a barrier to employment."

Solis said that, as of 2018, an estimated [880,000 non-citizens](#) made Los Angeles County their home. She also cited the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office, which had received applications from non-citizens who are otherwise allowed to practice law in California but are disqualified from the application process because of the citizenship requirement.

"Barriers to employment based on cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious characteristics are contrary to our core values. Citizenship overlaps these demographic characteristics," Los Angeles County Public Defender Ricardo García said. "This motion, by Supervisors Solis and Kuehl, will promote equity in hiring and give the Public Defender's Office access to the most qualified applicants for employment, irrespective of their citizenship status."

"An immigrant's experience will advance our vision, mission, and values to protect our clients' [legal and human rights](#) and enable us to more readily realize my goal that our employees fully represent the demographics of the population that we serve," García continued.

The new policy said ending the citizenship requirement will also help bring in workers who can speak multiple languages, thus "connecting with vulnerable communities and establishing new connections to critical services."

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HEADLINE	08/01 Russians use nuclear reactors for cover
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/01/world/europe/ukraine-south-counteroffensive-nuclear.html
GIST	<p>NIKOPOL, Ukraine — Along most of the front line in Russia's war in Ukraine, when one side lets loose with an artillery attack, the other shoots back.</p> <p>But not in Nikopol, a city deep in southern farm country where the Ukrainian military faces a new and vexing obstacle as it prepares for a major counteroffensive: a nuclear power station that the Russian Army has turned into a fortress.</p> <p>Nikopol, controlled by the Ukrainians, lies on the west bank of the Dnipro River. On the opposite bank sits a gigantic nuclear power plant — Europe's largest — that the Russian Army captured in March. The Russians have been firing from the cover of the Zaporizhzhia station since mid-July, Ukrainian military and civilian officials said, sending rockets over the river at Nikopol and other targets.</p>

It is, in effect, a free shot. Ukraine cannot unleash volleys of shells in return using American-provided advanced rocket systems, which have silenced Russian guns elsewhere on the front line. Doing so would risk striking one of the six pressurized water reactors or highly radioactive waste in storage. And Russia knows it.

“They are hiding there so they cannot be hit,” said Oleksandr Sayuk, the mayor of Nikopol. “Why else would they be at the electrical station? To use such an object as a shield is very dangerous.”

Residents have been fleeing Nikopol because of the dangers of both shelling and of a potential radiation leak. And those who remain feel helpless, as if they are targets in a shooting gallery.

“We are like condemned prisoners who must just stand still and be shot at,” said Halyna Hrashchenkova, a retiree whose home was hit by Russian artillery. “They shoot at us, and there is nothing we can do.”

The attacks from the nuclear plant are complicating Ukraine’s plans in the south, which has become the focal point of the war as Russian advances in the east have slowed.

The Ukrainian Army has for more than two months been telegraphing an intention to counterattack on the west bank of the Dnipro River, with the goal being to liberate the city of Kherson. Using a long-range American rocket-launching system known as HIMARS, Ukraine has been softening up Russian positions and cutting supply lines. This month rocket strikes destroyed a road and railroad bridges pivotal for Russian resupply of forces on the west bank, to the south of Nikopol, closer to Kherson.

As the counterattack picks up, the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant poses a quandary. Russian forces have occupied the nuclear site since March 4 but began using it for artillery strikes only three weeks ago, Ukrainian officials say, about when HIMARS appeared on the battlefield. Shielded from return fire, the Russians are menacing Ukrainian troops advancing toward the Nova Kakhovka dam on the Dnipro River, one of the last remaining crossing points for Russian resupply.

It is a problem Ukraine will have to solve as it moves troops and equipment into the area for the counteroffensive.

The Ukrainian Army’s retaliatory options at Nikopol are limited. One tactic it has tried is to execute precision strikes that avoid, as much as possible, the risk of damaging the reactors. On July 22, for instance, Ukraine’s military intelligence agency reported a strike with a kamikaze drone that blew up an anti-aircraft installation and a Grad rocket launcher and that killed soldiers in a tent camp about 150 yards from a reactor.

The fighting near the power plant has renewed worries that the war will set off a release of radiation in a country chockablock with delicate and dangerous nuclear sites, including Chernobyl, which Russia occupied in March but then abandoned. Last Friday, a huge, roiling plume of black smoke rose a few miles south of the reactors at Zaporizhzhia, and the Ukrainian military said it had hit a Russian ammunition depot.

When the Russian Army seized the Zaporizhzhia plant in March, combat ignited a fire — and a good deal of worry about nuclear safety. In that fighting, shrapnel hit but did not breach the containment structure of Reactor No. 1. Three of the six reactors are active now, and the others are idled or undergoing repairs.

Only a direct strike with a powerful weapon would penetrate the reactors’ yard-thick concrete containment vessels, said Dmytro Orlov, the exiled mayor of the city of Enerhodar, where the reactor is, and a former engineer at the plant. But if that happened, it would risk a meltdown or explosion that could spread radiation on the wind within Ukraine and beyond, as happened at Chernobyl in 1986, the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

Another risk is that a shell could hit the highly radioactive spent fuel stored in concrete canisters and spread radiation locally in the open air, like a dirty bomb.

The fatigue and stress of the Ukrainian control room employees at the reactor are also a concern. Russian soldiers have subjected them to harsh interrogations, including torture with electrical shocks, suspecting them of sabotage or of informing the Ukrainian military about activities at the plant, Mr. Orlov said. About a dozen have vanished after being abducted, he said.

The site is in a nuclear regulatory limbo. The Russian military controls the plant, but Ukrainian engineers operate it. The Russians allow Ukrainian truck convoys across the front line with spare parts and chemicals needed to process cooling water. Ukrainian nuclear regulators also cross the front to visit the plant. Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear company, has dispatched about a dozen engineers to monitor its operation.

Across the river in Nikopol, the hospitals keep an emergency supply of iodine tablets to treat radiation exposure, a precaution that predated the war. Little else can be done to protect the population, said Mr. Sayuk, the mayor.

Last Friday, the walking paths on the city's riverfront esplanade were deserted, though it was a beautiful day.

The paths overlooked the nuclear plant's cooling towers and the column of black smoke nearby — all boding ill for Nikopol residents. Those who remain in town keep mostly to their homes.

Over the past three weeks, the Russian military has parked Grad multiple rocket launchers between the reactor buildings, to protect them from retaliatory strikes, said Mr. Orlov, who is in touch with plant employees.

The Russians have also parked an armored personnel carrier and Ural military trucks in the turbine room of Reactor No. 1. The vehicles block a fire access route, Mr. Orlov said, posing a hazard to the entire plant. His assertions could not be independently verified.

The strikes have been hitting homes seemingly at random in the city's outlying district, punching craters in vegetable gardens, starting fires and blowing out windows.

Ms. Hrashchenkova's house was hit by an artillery shell that did not explode, sparing her and her home. Elsewhere in town, artillery crushed roofs and blew holes in brick walls.

The agency has also publicly appealed to residents of nearby Enerhodar to engage in partisan resistance that would not pose a risk to the plant. The Russian-installed mayor of Enerhodar was wounded in a bombing in May. This month, a Russian field kitchen at the station mysteriously exploded, wounding soldiers.

And Ukrainian artillery officers have had no qualms about targeting the Russian military in Enerhodar, which is about two miles from the plant. Overnight from Thursday to Friday, explosions destroyed two cars and damaged a hotel where Russians quartered, wounding eight soldiers, Mr. Orlov said.

"The Russian military is beginning to feel uneasy and understand that they are not there forever, as they say, but soon they will either be killed or surrender to Ukrainian captivity," Petro Kotkin, the president of Ukraine's national nuclear power company, Energoatom, told the Ukrainian news media.

Still, the nuclear plant presents a unique challenge that Ukraine has not had to deal with previously in the war.

	<p>Col. Serhiy Shatalov, who has been leading a Ukrainian infantry battalion on a creeping, village-by-village advance toward the Nova Kakhovka dam, said Russian artillery had mostly gone quiet after a few weeks of HIMARS strikes — except from the Russian units at the nuclear power plant.</p> <p>“How can we respond?” he said. “This is a nuclear site.”</p> <p>Of the Russians’ use of the reactors for cover, he said, “don’t search for fairness in war, especially if you fight the Russians.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/01 Wheat price tumbles, famine still looms
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/01/world/ukraine-russia-news-war
GIST	<p>The price of wheat has tumbled from its peak after Russia invaded Ukraine, but experts say one of the world’s most widely consumed foods remains in short supply and warn that a global hunger crisis still looms.</p> <p>Like oil, steel, beef and other commodities integral to the economy, wheat shifts in price and availability in response to a complex set of overlapping factors, such as geopolitics and the weather.</p> <p>While the falling price of wheat offers some respite for countries dependent on importing the crop, it may dissuade farmers from planting more. Nor does the drop in price address pre-existing problems worsened by a war between two of the world’s biggest producers. Energy prices remain high, affecting the cost of running farm equipment and transporting the wheat to market as well as the cost of fertilizer. And hot, dry weather that crimps crop yields is becoming more common.</p> <p>“The fundamental picture hasn’t really changed,” said Ehsan Khoman, who manages emerging-market and commodities research for Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, a Japanese bank. “There is a potential where food prices could spiral out of control.”</p> <p>Russia’s invasion of Ukraine caused food and fuel prices to soar, as war and sanctions disrupted supplies from two of the world’s major agriculture and energy exporters. The two countries together account for roughly a quarter of global wheat exports, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.</p> <p>After the initial shock of the invasion, higher prices dissuaded some countries from buying wheat, lowering demand and weighing on prices. An uptick in supply from winter wheat harvests has also lowered prices in recent weeks. On Friday, wheat traded at a little more than \$8 a bushel in Chicago, a global hub for the grain. That’s just above the price before the invasion.</p> <p>One major factor has been the progress of negotiations to over the fate of more than 20 million metric tons of grain stuck in Black Sea ports in Ukraine, which could begin moving again this week. But experts say it probably won’t be enough to address other issues hanging over the global wheat market.</p> <p>“This agreement has been built up as something that will be a solution to the world’s food shortage, and it is just not,” said Tracey Allen, an agricultural commodities strategist at JPMorgan Chase.</p> <p>Other, more entrenched factors in the wheat market, from the prices of energy and fertilizer to climate change, could play a bigger role in determining the cost — and availability — of a loaf of bread around the world.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Tensions flare Kosovo-Serbia border
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/31/world/europe/kosovo-serbia-border-gunfire.html
GIST	<p>A dispute over license plates between the Balkan nations of Kosovo and Serbia, from whom Kosovo split 14 years ago, yielded protests and gunfire Sunday night, prompting fears that the violence could escalate as Western countries are focused on the war in Ukraine.</p>

Amid demonstrators who built barricades, unknown gunmen fired on Kosovo police officers along the restive northern border with Serbia on the eve of a new law requiring ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo to switch from Serbian license plates to Kosovar ones in the next two months. Many Serbs in Kosovo still use Serbian-issued plates, which the government considers illegal.

Kosovo's government had also said that beginning Monday, all Serbian ID and passports holders must obtain an extra document to enter Kosovo, just as Kosovars must do to enter to Serbia.

No one was injured by the gunfire, but in response to the violence, the Kosovo police closed two northern border crossings.

"The following hours, days and weeks may be challenging and problematic," Kosovo's prime minister, Albin Kurti, said in a video released on his social media channels.

Similar protests over license plates [flared a year ago](#), but observers say that tensions are higher this time because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which consumes the focus of Kosovo's most important ally, the United States, as well as that of the European Union.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, nine years after a 78-day NATO bombing campaign pushed out Serb forces from the former province. Serbia — as well as its key allies, Russia and China — still refuses to recognize Kosovo's independence, and insists on protecting its ethnic Serb kin, who make up about 5 percent of Kosovo's population of 1.8 million people.

A little less than half of Kosovo's Serb population lives in four northern municipalities bordering Serbia and many have been reluctant to recognize the authorities in Kosovo's capital, Pristina, preferring to live as though they were still part of Serbia.

The European Union has mediated negotiations between both governments since 2011 and slowly, the police, courts and municipalities have come under Pristina's control. But, encouraged by the political leadership in Belgrade, Serbia's capital, Serbian nationalists protest each additional attempt at integration.

"We will pray for peace and seek peace, but there will be no surrender and Serbia will win," President Aleksandar Vucic of Serbia said on Sunday at a news conference. "If they dare to persecute and mistreat and kill Serbs, Serbia will win," he continued, adding later, "We've never been in a more difficult, complicated situation than today."

Mr. Vucic, who convened a high-level meeting of security and military officials on Sunday night, said that the Kosovar government was trying to cast him in the same light as President Vladimir V. Putin by blaming the unrest on Serbia's close relationship with Russia, a fellow Slavic and Orthodox Christian nation.

Kosovo's leader, Mr. Vucic said during Sunday's news conference, was trying to take advantage of the global mood by projecting that "big Putin gave orders to little Putin, so the new Zelensky, in the form of Albin Kurti, will be a savior and fight against the great Serbian hegemony."

Vladimir Djukanovic, a Serbian member of Parliament from Mr. Vucic's ruling party, also linked the border spat to the war in Ukraine, tweeting, "Seems to me that Serbia will be forced to begin the denazification of the Balkans," an ominous reference to Russia's justification for the invasion of Ukraine.

Serbia, a candidate to join the European Union, has [maintained](#) close ties with Moscow and has not joined Western sanctions on Russia, though it did vote in favor of [a United Nations resolution condemning the Russian invasion](#) of Ukraine. Belgrade and Moscow share animosity for the NATO military alliance because of its bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, when Mr. Vucic was a spokesman for the Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic.

	<p>NATO still maintains a peacekeeping presence in Kosovo, with a force of approximately 3,700 troops. In a news release, NATO said its force on the ground was “ready to intervene if stability is jeopardized.”</p> <p>After a meeting with the U.S. ambassador on Sunday night, Kosovo’s government announced it would delay the implementation of both the license plate and identification decisions by one month.</p> <p>Russia quickly weighed in on Sunday, calling the license plate and identification laws “another step to oust the Serbian population from Kosovo,” Russia’s news agency, TASS, reported.</p> <p>“We call on Pristina and the United States and the European Union backing it to stop provocation and observe the Serbs’ rights in Kosovo,” said Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry.</p> <p>Kosovo’s northern border with Serbia has been a hub of violence in the past. In 2011, when the Kosovo police sought to take full control of area, one Kosovo police officer was killed and 25 more were injured.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/01 Ship loaded w/grain leaves Odesa port
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/01/world/ukraine-russia-news-war?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing#a-ship-loaded-with-grain-leaves-a-port-in-ukraines-odesa-region-for-the-first-time-since-the-war-began
GIST	<p>MYKOLAIV, Ukraine — For the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine more than five months ago, a ship loaded with grain left a port in Ukraine’s Odesa region on Monday following an international deal that could ease global food prices and bring relief to countries facing hunger by allowing Ukraine to restart grain shipments in the Black Sea.</p> <p>The ship, the Razoni, which weighed anchor at the port of Odesa, was led by a government vessel through a maze of mines that had been laid by Ukrainian forces to forestall any attempt by Moscow to launch an amphibious assault on Odesa. A rescue ship followed and Russia’s Navy, which controls the Black Sea, granted safe passage.</p> <p>The Razoni was carrying 26,000 metric tons of corn, the United Nations said. The vessel had been stuck in port since Feb. 18, before the start of the war.</p> <p>Ukraine’s minister of infrastructure, Oleksandr Kubrakov, said the ship left around 9:30 a.m. local time. There are 16 more ships waiting to leave Odesa in coming days, he said. It was headed toward Istanbul, then Lebanon, according to Ukrainian and Turkish officials.</p> <p>The voyage is one step toward addressing one of the far-reaching consequences of the invasion launched by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in February. Russia’s blockade of grain in Ukraine, one of the world’s breadbaskets, has sent global grain prices soaring and brought the threat of famine to tens of millions of people, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.</p> <p>Russia, whose exports have been hit by sanctions, and Ukraine supply more than a quarter of the world’s wheat, and Russia is a major supplier of fertilizer. Ukraine is also a leading exporter of barley, corn and sunflower.</p> <p>If successful, the deal to export grain could have significant economic consequences for Ukraine, as well as for international markets. Ukraine’s agriculture minister, Mykola Soloskyi, said last week that there was \$10 billion worth of grain stored in Ukraine and that the incoming harvest would add a further \$20 billion to that amount.</p> <p>Since the war began, the European Union and other Western countries have explored overland routes for the country’s grain, but such alternatives have proved to be more costly, slower and less effective.</p>

	<p>Under a deal signed on July 22 in Istanbul after months of negotiations brokered by the United Nations and Turkey, Ukraine can ship some 20 million tons of grain that has been blocked at its Black Sea ports. The agreement — the first deal that Russia and Ukraine have publicly signed since the war began — was cast into uncertainty a day later, when Russia launched a missile attack on the port of Odesa. But progress on establishing shipping routes and inspection protocols continued without interruption.</p> <p>To maneuver the grain out of port, Ukrainian captains will navigate safe passages mapped by the country's navy through the mines. The shipments will follow a route to Turkish ports approved by the Russian Navy, which has demanded that the unloaded ships are inspected before they return to Ukraine to ensure they carry no weapons.</p> <p>Teams from Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the U.N. will jointly carry out the inspections, and a joint command center set up in Istanbul is to monitoring the movement of grain.</p> <p>The agreement will last 120 days, but it could be renewed on a rolling basis.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/01 New Zealand: will still cooperate w/China
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/01/new-zealand-china-jacinda-ardern
GIST	<p>New Zealand will continue to cooperate on “shared interests” with China, even as tensions increase in the region and China grows “more assertive in the pursuit of its interests”, Jacinda Ardern has said.</p> <p>Speaking to the China Business Summit in Auckland on Monday, the prime minister said she was planning a trip to China “to seize new opportunities for dialogue,” support the trade relationship, and further cooperate on the climate crisis.</p> <p>“Even as China becomes more assertive in the pursuit of its interests, there are still shared interests on which we can and should cooperate,” she said.</p> <p>The prime minister’s speech comes during a tense period for the Indo-Pacific, with western allies concerned about China’s push for influence, particularly its proposed regional Pacific security deal. Ardern called for Beijing to respect and support the institutions that she said undergirded regional and international peace and stability.</p> <p>Both New Zealand and China had been “major beneficiaries of relative peace, stability and prosperity ... The rules, norms and institutions, such as the United Nations, that underlie that stability and prosperity remain indispensable,” Ardern said, but are also “under threat”.</p> <p>“We see how much we have to lose should the international rules-based system falter,” she said.</p> <p>The speech was closely wedded to the party line of Ardern’s second-term government’s foreign policy. The policy has emphasised “respect, consistency, and predictability” in dealings with China: essentially, that the government will continue to cooperate and work closely with China on mutually beneficial matters, particularly trade, while calling out differences – typically on foreign policy and human rights.</p> <p>That balancing act has, at times, been a difficult one to manage. New Zealand remains highly dependent on China for trade – the country is its largest trading partner, accounting for 23% of total trade and 32% of goods exports.</p> <p>But as China’s economic importance to New Zealand has grown, ideological differences with Beijing have become increasingly stark, with reports of severe human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Beijing’s push into the Pacific and South China Sea, and erosion of democracy in Hong Kong.</p>

“In response to increasing tensions or risks in the region – be they in the Pacific, the South China Sea, or the Taiwan Strait – New Zealand’s position remains consistent – we call for adherence to international rules and norms; for diplomacy, de-escalation and dialogue rather than threats, force and coercion,” Ardern said.

“Our differences need not define us. But we cannot ignore them. This will mean continuing to speak out on some issues – sometimes with others and sometimes alone,” she said.

“We have done this recently on issues in the Pacific. We also have consistently expressed our concerns about economic coercion, human rights, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong.”

One of the prime minister’s primary examples of faltering institutions and norms was Putin’s war on Ukraine, and she called on China to “to be clear that it does not support the Russian invasion” and “to use its access and influence to help bring an end to the conflict”.

Over the past year, the Pacific has become an arena for broader geopolitical competition: with increasing interest from China, the US has also been looking to beef up its connections and alliances in the region. Following Ardern’s speech on Monday, the commander of the US military in the Pacific said he wanted to expand and strengthen its ties with New Zealand.

Adm John Aquilino, head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, was in Wellington to meet top New Zealand defence force and government officials.

“Our partnership runs very deep,” Aquilino said. “We are doing many things together to continue to ensure peace and prosperity for both of our nations and for all the nations in the region.”

He said the leadership of Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific was “critically important”.

In June, the US signed Partners in the Blue Pacific, a cooperation agreement between Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the UK, and US.

“The United States has been a Pacific nation our entire life. We will continue to operate in the Pacific no matter what else you might hear,” Aquilino said.

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HEADLINE	08/01 Day 159 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/01/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-159-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia is moving large numbers of troops to Ukraine’s south in preparation for a Ukrainian counteroffensive, according to Ukraine’s deputy head of military intelligence. “They are increasing their troop numbers, preparing for our counteroffensive [in Ukraine’s south] and perhaps preparing to launch an offensive of their own,” Vadym Skibitsky said. The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russia was relocating some of its troops from their positions in the east to the south in order to push towards Kherson’s regional capital as well as the Zaporizhzhia region.• Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been urged to evacuate the frontline eastern Donetsk region, the scene of fierce clashes with the Russian military. More than 50,000 children are still in the region, according to local officials. “They need to be evacuated, you cannot put them in mortal danger in the winter without heating, light, without the ability to keep them warm,” Kyiv’s ministry of reintegration of temporarily occupied territories said in a statement.• Russia claims five people were injured after a Ukrainian drone strike on its Black Sea fleet headquarters, prompting officials to cancel festivities planned for Navy Day. “Early this morning, [Ukraine] decided to spoil our Navy Day,” said Mikhail Razvozhayev, the head of the local Russian administration in Sevastopol in Crimea. “An unidentified object flew into the yard of the fleet headquarters. According to preliminary data, it was a drone. Five people were injured.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian strikes hit the southern Ukrainian port city of Mykolaiv early on Sunday, wounding three people and damaging homes and schools, according to the city's mayor, Oleksandr Senkevych. Zelenskiy described the strikes as "probably the most brutal" on the city and region of the entire war. • Russian shelling on Mykolaiv reportedly killed one of Ukraine's wealthiest men, Oleksiy Vadatursky, and his wife, Raisa. Vadatursky headed the grain production and export business Nibulon, which included a fleet of ships for sending grain abroad. A presidential adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said Vadatursky was specifically targeted and his death was "not an accident, but a well-thought-out and organised premeditated murder". • The International Committee of the Red Cross has not yet received permission to visit the building in Olenivka where at least 50 prisoners Ukrainian prisoners of war were killed, it said on Sunday. Russia said it had invited experts from the UN and Red Cross to examine the deaths "in the interests of conducting an objective investigation". Zelenskiy denounced the attack as a war crime. • Two-hundred Russian marines from the 810th naval infantry brigade refused to return to fight in the southern regions of Ukraine, according to Ukraine's defence ministry intelligence directorate. • Ukraine's harvest this year could be half its usual amount because of the Russian invasion, Zelenskiy claimed. "Ukrainian harvest this year is under the threat to be twice less," the Ukrainian president said in comments likely to intensify fears of global hunger. • The first grain-exporting ship could leave Ukraine's ports on Monday, a spokesperson for the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said. Speaking in an interview with broadcaster Kanal 7, Ibrahim Kalin said the joint coordination centre in Istanbul would probably complete the final work on the exporting routes very soon. • Britain will now require foreign companies holding UK property to identify their true owners as part of a crackdown on Russian oligarchs and corrupt elites laundering illicit wealth. The Register of Overseas Entities will seek to ensure criminals cannot hide behind secretive chains of shell companies or use property in Britain to hide dirty money, the business ministry said in a statement on Monday.
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HEADLINE	07/31 US eyes companies over Iran oil exports
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-eyes-sanctions-against-global-network-it-believes-is-shipping-iranian-oil-11659276000?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The U.S. is considering sanctions that would target a United Arab Emirates-based businessman and a network of companies suspected of helping export Iran's oil, part of a broader effort to escalate diplomatic pressure on Tehran as U.S. officials push to reach a deal on Iran's nuclear program.</p> <p>The firms and individuals under scrutiny have been using ship-to-ship transfers of oil in waters that lie between Iraq and Iran and then forging documents to hide the origin of the cargo, according to corporate documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, shipping data and people familiar with the matter. By passing off the blended oil as Iraqi, those involved can avoid Western sanctions targeting Iranian oil.</p> <p>Yet within the administration, there isn't consensus on plans to target these sorts of suspected sanctions-evading operations. The administration wants to renew a nuclear deal as a way to rein in Iran's nuclear plans, but is also dealing with opposition to a deal and grappling with the economic impact of Russia's war in Ukraine and sanctions, current and former officials familiar with the issue said.</p> <p>Since the nuclear talks with Iran stalled this year, the administration has levied two rounds of sanctions against companies it alleges are smuggling Iranian oil, an escalation designed to remind Iran of the costs of failing to negotiate. Still, some current and former U.S. officials say the Biden administration has held at bay a full-scale enforcement campaign in order to revive the nuclear agreement, which President Trump exited in 2018.</p>

“So long as the Iranians don’t take the offer on the table and return to the JCPOA,” a senior administration official said, referring to the nuclear agreement, “my expectation would be that we will continue to see a rollout of these sorts of enforcement actions on a pretty regular basis going forward.”

The National Security Council directed questions to the State Department. A State Department spokesman said, “Any speculation that the administration is withholding sanctions on Iran to avoid supposed inflationary effects is equally false.”

Robert Greenway, who oversaw Iran policy as the senior director for Middle East policy at the National Security Council during the Trump administration, said Iran’s sanctions-evading operations through Iraq—including blending Iranian and Iraqi oil to hide its origin—represented up to 25% of Tehran’s exports when he was at the NSC in 2020.

“It mattered a great deal to Tehran, especially as Iran was under significant market pressure,” said Mr. Greenway, now a fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative Washington-based think tank.

Much of Iran’s blended oil, which included both crude and refined oil, was bought by customers in Asia, but Western companies such as [Exxon Mobil](#) Corp., Koch Industries Inc. and [Shell](#) PLC also were involved in the transactions, according to the documents and former employees. Those Western companies either conducted transactions for the firms involved in blending the oil, acted as third-party shipping brokers or bought the blended oil.

There are no allegations that the Western firms intentionally violated sanctions. Exxon and Koch declined to comment. Curtis Smith, a spokesman for Shell, said the company is examining past data in an attempt to assess how this practice could have potentially affected Shell cargo. Meanwhile, he said, the firm is committed to being “wholly compliant with all applicable international laws, trade controls and sanctions.”

U.S. officials, the people familiar with the matter said, believe the man behind the oil-blending operation is Salim Ahmed Said, an Iraqi-born British citizen, and a number of companies that share email and corporate addresses with his firms, including Al-Iraqia Shipping Services & Oil Trading FZE, known as AISSOT.

In emails to the Journal, Mr. Said denied owning AISSOT or violating U.S. sanctions against Iran with any of the companies he owns or controls. “I am the owner of Ikon Petroleum and Rhine Shipping. I am not the owner of Aissot,” he said. “My companies have not shipped Iranian oil in violation of U.S. sanctions at all and all my trades with Iraq were entirely legitimate.”

Western officials believe Mr. Said’s alleged sanctions-evading operations date to shortly after the Trump administration announced in mid-2017 it was considering reimposing sweeping sanctions against Iran to coerce Tehran into a new nuclear and security pact.

Around the time of that announcement, Iraq’s then-oil minister, Jabbar Ali Hussein Al Luaibi, helped create a new company as the sole exporter of the country’s oil. The company, AISSOT, was a joint venture between the state-owned Iraqi Oil Tankers Co. and the Arab Maritime Petroleum Transport Co., whose primary owners include several Gulf countries, according to the people and documents.

Mr. Luaibi said at the time that the joint venture would make Iraq a major international player in the energy-shipping sector. Current and former U.S. and Iraqi officials say the venture was really a vehicle to help Iran export oil.

“They’re exporting Iraqi energy products, but the real bread and butter of the business was the 5-10% of Iranian oil exports, fuel-oil exports and other exports,” a former Western official familiar with AISSOT’s operations said.

AISSOT in a 2020 statement said neither it nor its affiliates were involved in any activities under sanction, including the trade of Iranian energy exports, calling the allegations “baseless and false.” The company declined to comment for this article.

Mr. Said isn’t listed as an AISSOT official or owner, according to corporate documents. But numerous former senior employees said he controls the company. Mr. Said “is running the whole show,” said Muhanad Alwan, adding that he was hired by Mr. Said to head AISSOT’s Iraq operations until mid-2020. Mr. Alwan also said Mr. Said told him that Iranians have an ownership interest in AISSOT.

“Salim [Said] was the boss,” another person with direct knowledge of AISSOT’s operations said.

Mr. Said’s businesses, including Ikon Petroleum, have been primary contractors for AISSOT operations and have shared addresses and senior management, according to the former employees and the corporate documents and property records. AISSOT’s Iraqi oil shipments, in turn, were used to surreptitiously sell Iranian crude and fuels, the former employees said.

Iran’s mission to the United Nations, Iraq’s embassy in Washington, the Arab Maritime Petroleum Transport Company, and Mr. Luaibi, contacted through AISSOT and companies they own, didn’t respond to requests for comment.

AISSOT—and the other companies linked to Mr. Said through common email and corporate addresses—blended Iraqi and Iranian oil using ship-to-ship transfers in the waters that lie between the two countries, according to the people and documents. The tankers would stop transmitting their locations while en route through the Persian Gulf and then use falsified documents to declare the cargo as Iraqi, according to the former employees, private shipping reports citing satellite data and official shipping-registry documents.

Mr. Alwan, the former head of AISSOT’s Iraq operations, said most of the blended oil on the ship was from Iran, and its origin was hidden with fake documentation.

“Smugglers get Iraqi or Omani documents for Iranian smuggled oil products,” Mr. Alwan said. One of the vessels believed to be involved was a tanker called the Babel, which shipping data show was operated between 2017 and August 2020 by Rhine Shipping DMCC, a company owned by Mr. Said. AISSOT chartered the Babel for its operations during that time, according to the people familiar with the matter, former employees and shipping data.

In March 2020, according to the corporate records and shipping data, the Iran-owned Polaris 1 tanker loaded the Babel with 231,000 barrels of fuel oil, valued at around \$9 million, in a ship-to-ship transfer. Also in March, separate shipping data show the Babel during the same period delivered fuel oil in Iraqi waters to the Da Li Hu tanker—owned by a [subsidiary of China’s state-owned shipping giant that was then under sanctions](#).

AISSOT’s operations started to come under scrutiny after the Iraqi government’s anticorruption council launched an investigation in mid-2019, according to Iraqi government records reviewed by the Journal.

The Palau International Shipping Registry, where the Babel was registered in 2020, revoked the vessel’s certificate in late October of that year for allegedly turning off its transponder and uploading petroleum products at the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas that month, the registry said.

Babel’s actions violate the “sanctions regimes imposed by the European Union and the United States of America’s Office of Foreign Asset Control,” Panos Kirnidis, the registry’s chief executive, wrote to the ship’s owners.

In February 2020, the Iraqi government terminated the joint-venture agreement with AISSOT, but shipping records show the state-owned oil-marketing company worked with AISSOT through at least 2021.

HEADLINE	07/31 China warns US: avoid visit to Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/pelosi-travels-with-delegation-to-asia-amid-chinese-warnings-not-to-visit-taiwan-11659293173?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>House Speaker Nancy Pelosi led a delegation of Democratic lawmakers to Asia on Sunday in the face of stern warnings from Beijing that the group should avoid a stop in Taiwan.</p> <p>A statement issued Sunday by Mrs. Pelosi's office said the group's travels would include visits to Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan but didn't address whether Taiwan was still on the itinerary. Mrs. Pelosi (D., Calif.) has long been critical of China on human-rights issues and a visit to Taiwan would make her the most senior politician to visit the island in 25 years.</p> <p>The possibility of a Taiwan stop has created a dilemma for the Biden administration. Should Mrs. Pelosi's delegation forgo a stop in Taiwan, Republican lawmakers are poised to criticize the Democrats for backing down, but if she does go ahead with the visit, the already sharp tensions between China and the Biden administration are expected to escalate further.</p> <p>President Biden has said that the U.S. military doesn't think her visit is a good idea but has refrained from saying publicly if she should make the trip.</p> <p>The other members of the delegation include Gregory Meeks of New York, who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Mark Takano of California, who chairs the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.</p> <p>Other members are Suzan DelBene of Washington, the vice chair of the House Ways and Means Committee; Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, a member of the House Intelligence Committee; and Andy Kim of New Jersey, who is a member of the House Armed Services and House Foreign Affairs Committees.</p> <p>During a stop to refuel in Hawaii, the delegation met with leadership of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Mrs. Pelosi said in a statement.</p> <p>"Today, our Congressional delegation travels to the Indo-Pacific to reaffirm America's strong and unshakable commitment to our allies and friends in the region," Mrs. Pelosi added.</p> <p>The Pentagon said last week that it was moving the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and its strike group toward the South China Sea.</p> <p>On Saturday, China said it was conducting live fire military drills near Pingtan Island off Fujian province, which is opposite Taiwan.</p> <p>Chinese leader Xi Jinping told Mr. Biden in a call Thursday that "those that play with fire will perish by it," a phrase that American officials took as a warning about a potential Taiwan visit by Mrs. Pelosi.</p> <p>Newt Gingrich traveled to Taiwan in 1997 when he was House speaker, but tensions between China and the U.S. have increased markedly since then.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Recall: Banana Boat sunscreen spray
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/banana-boat-recall-hair-and-scalp-sunscreen-spray-carcinogen-benzene-11659279774?mod=hp_lista_pos3
GIST	Edgewell Personal Care Co issued a voluntary recall of one of its Banana Boat sunscreen spray products after an internal review found trace levels of the carcinogen benzene in some samples.

Edgewell pulled several batches of its Banana Boat Hair & Scalp Sunscreen Spray SPF 30 after tests found that the product contained small amounts of the cancer-causing chemical, the manufacturer said Friday in a statement [to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).

The company said benzene isn't an ingredient in any Banana Boat product, but an internal review showed that unexpected levels of the chemical came from the propellant that sprays the sunscreen out of the can.

Exposure to benzene could potentially result in blood disorders, leukemia and other cancers, the company said. Edgewell said it hasn't received any notice of adverse events related to the recall to date.

"Daily exposure to benzene in the recalled products would not be expected to cause adverse health consequences according to an independent health assessment using established exposure modeling guidelines," the company said.

The Shelton, Conn.-based company said in its voluntary recall that the affected products have expiration dates of December 2022, February 2023 and April 2024.

Consumers can identify possibly tainted products by the lot numbers on the bottom of Banana Boat Hair & Scalp Sunscreen Spray SPF 30 cans.

Lot numbers 20016AF, 20084BF and 21139AF shouldn't be used, the company said.

Banana Boat will offer reimbursement to consumers who bought the recalled sunscreen spray products packaged in aerosol cans.

The products were distributed nationwide in the U.S. through various retailers and online. Edgewell said it has notified its retailers to remove any remaining recalled product from shelves.

Benzene, a colorless chemical with a sweet odor, is found in natural sources like volcanoes and forest fires, and can also be man-made, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is widely used in the U.S., ranking in the top 20 chemicals for production volume, the CDC said.

In July 2021, [Johnson & Johnson](#) recalled most of its [Neutrogena and Aveeno spray sunscreens](#) from U.S. stores [after detecting benzene](#) in some samples. Later that year, [Procter & Gamble Co.](#) issued [a recall for its Old Spice and Secret](#) antiperspirant sprays after benzene was detected in some of the products.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Hope for justice Beirut explosion fades
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/years-hope-justice-beirut-explosion-fades-87734249
GIST	<p>BEIRUT -- It's been two years since his 3-year-old daughter, Alexandra, was killed in a massive explosion at Beirut's port — and Paul Naggear has lost hope that outrage over the disaster will bring justice and force change in Lebanon.</p> <p>The investigation into one of the world's biggest non-nuclear explosions has been blocked for months by Lebanon's political powers. Many blame the Lebanese government's longtime corruption and mismanagement for the tragedy, but the elite's decades-old lock on power has ensured they are untouchable.</p> <p>In fact, some of those charged in the probe were re-elected to parliament earlier this year.</p> <p>Even as the wrecked silos at the port have been burning for weeks — a fire ignited by the fermenting grains still inside them — authorities seemed to have given up on trying to put out the blaze. A section of the silos collapsed Sunday in a huge cloud of dust.</p>

"It has been two years and nothing's happened," Naggear, said of the Aug. 4, 2020 disaster, when hundreds of tons of highly explosive ammonium nitrate, a material used in fertilizers, detonated at the port. "It's as if my daughter was just hit by a car."

The blast caused a pressure wave that shattered everything in its path across the capital.

Naggear, his wife, Tracy Awad, and little Alexandra were in their apartment overlooking the port when the massive force sent glass, furniture and other debris flying. Naggear and his wife suffered cuts and bruises. Alexandra, or Lexou, as they called her, was severely injured and died in the hospital.

She was the second-youngest victim of the explosion, which killed more than 215 people and injured more than 6,000.

It later emerged that the ammonium nitrate had been shipped to Lebanon in 2013 and stored improperly at a port warehouse ever since. Senior political and security officials knew of its presence but did nothing.

Lebanon's factional political leaders, who have divvied up power among themselves for decades, closed ranks to thwart any accountability.

Tarek Bitar, the judge leading the investigation, charged four former senior government officials with intentional killing and negligence that led to the deaths of dozens of people. He also charged several top security officials in the case.

But his work has been blocked for eight months pending a Court of Cassation ruling after three former Cabinet ministers filed legal challenges. The court can't rule until a number of vacancies caused by judges retiring are filled. The appointments, signed by the justice minister, are still awaiting approval from the finance minister, an ally of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Judicial officials with knowledge of Bitar's investigation told The Associated Press it was in advanced stages of answering key questions — including who owned the nitrates, how they entered the port and how the explosion happened. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the investigation.

Bitar is the second judge to take the case. The first judge was forced out after complaints were raised against him by two Cabinet ministers, and if the same happens to Bitar it would likely be the final blow to the investigation.

The lack of justice compounds the pain of relatives and friends of blast victims. They feel let down and abandoned, not only by the government but by public apathy as the months and years have dragged on.

Initially after the explosion, there were large protests and sit-ins demanding justice. It raised hopes that Lebanon's politicians might be held accountable.

But public fervor waned as Lebanese became absorbed with surviving the country's economic collapse. Also, deadly gun battles erupted last year between Hezbollah supporters protesting against Bitar and members of a Christian faction, raising fears that pressing the investigation could push Lebanon into factional conflict.

Now only a handful of people show up at protests and sit-ins organized by relatives of the victims.

Families remain wracked by grief.

For Muhieddine Ladkani, whose father, Mohammed, was killed, time has stood still.

When they first heard explosions coming from the port, his father took the family into their apartment's entrance hall, believing it would be safe since there were no windows. But the blast tore the front door off

its hinges and sent a cupboard slamming into the elder Ladkani. He was in a coma for weeks with a brain hemorrhage. He died 31 days later.

Ladkani, a 29-year-old law student, said his family still can't talk about that day.

"We still cannot remember, and we cannot gather as a family," he said. "My brothers and uncles have my father's photos as their profile photo. I don't. Whenever I remember my father, I collapse."

"It is something that I don't want to believe. I can't live with it," Ladkani said. Those who voted for the politicians charged in the disaster are also responsible for his father's death, he added.

"The ink on the fingers of the voters who voted for them is not ink but the blood of the victims," Ladkani said.

One of the charged and reelected politicians, former public works minister Ghazi Zeiter, told the AP he had the right to run for parliament again because there is no court verdict against him. He said Bitar has no right to charge him because legislators and ministers have a special court where they are usually tried.

Amid the deadlock, some victims' families are turning to courts outside Lebanon.

In mid-July, families filed a \$250 million lawsuit against an American-Norwegian firm, TGS, suspected of involvement in bringing the explosive material to the port. TGS has denied any wrongdoing.

Naggear said his family, two others and the Bar Association have filed a lawsuit in Britain against the London-registered chemical trading company, Savaro Ltd., which investigative journalists in Lebanon say chartered the shipment, intending to take the nitrates from Georgia to an explosives firm in Mozambique.

Naggear said he is losing hope.

He and his wife, who is a dual Lebanese-Canadian citizen, had thought about leaving Lebanon after the blast. But the large public protests in the immediate aftermath gave them hope that change was possible.

But after this year's parliamentary election results, they are again seriously considering leaving.

Still, they vow to continue working for justice. At a recent sit-in, they showed up with their 4-month-old baby, Axel.

"They are trying to make us forget ... but we will not stop, for (Alexandra's) sake until we reach the truth and justice," Naggear said.

The Naggears have repaired their apartment, but they haven't stayed there since Axel's birth, fearing it was still not safe.

The fire burning in the ruins of the grain silos only feeds the sense of danger. A northern section of the structure collapsed on Sunday, and experts say more parts are at risk of falling. At night, orange flames can be seen licking at the base of the northern silo, glowing eerily in the darkness.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Ukraine forces seek to retake south
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-seeks-retake-south-tying-russian-forces-87734639
GIST	Even as Moscow's war machine crawls across Ukraine's east, trying to achieve the Kremlin's goal of securing full control over the country's industrial heartland, Ukrainian forces are scaling up attacks to reclaim territory in the Russian-occupied south.

The Ukrainians have used American-supplied rocket launchers to strike bridges and military infrastructure in the south, forcing Russia to divert its forces from the Donbas in the east to counter the new threat.

With the war in Ukraine now in its sixth month, the coming weeks may prove decisive.

While the bulk of Russian and Ukrainian military assets are concentrated in the Donbas, the industrial region of mines and factories, both sides hope to make gains elsewhere.

Ukraine has vowed to drive the Russians from the territory they have seized since the start of the invasion, including the southern region of Kherson and part of the Zaporizhzhia region, while Moscow has pledged to hold on to the occupied areas and take more ground around the country.

The Donbas consists of Luhansk province, now fully controlled by Russia, and Donetsk province, about half of which is in Moscow's hands.

Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov noted that by stepping up the attacks in the south, Kyiv has forced Russia to spread its forces.

"The Russian military command has been put before a dilemma: to try to press the offensive in the Donetsk region or build up defenses in the south," Zhdanov said. "It's going to be difficult for them to perform both tasks simultaneously for a long time."

He noted that rather than trying to mount a massive, all-out counteroffensive, the Ukrainians have sought to undermine the Russian military in the south with a series of strikes on its munitions and fuel depots and other key sites.

"It doesn't have to be a head-on attack," Zhdanov noted.

Moscow-backed local officials in Ukraine's east and south have talked about holding votes on joining Russia as early as September. Those plans hinge on Russia's ability to win full control of those areas by then.

"The Kremlin's chief goal is to force Kyiv to sit down for talks, secure the existing line of contact and hold referenda in the autumn," said Mykola Sunhurovsky, of the Razumkov Center, a Kyiv-based think tank.

He noted that Western weapons have boosted Ukraine's capabilities, allowing it to reach targets far behind the front lines with a high degree of precision.

Ukraine has received about a dozen American-built HIMARS multiple rocket launchers and has used them to strike Russian ammunition depots, which are essential for maintaining Moscow's edge in firepower. HIMARS systems have a range of 80 kilometers (50 miles), enabling the Ukrainians to hit the Russians from beyond the reach of most of the enemy's artillery.

"It's a serious advantage," Sunhurovsky said. "The Ukrainians have started dealing precision strikes on Russian depots, command posts, railway stations and bridges, destroying logistical chains and undermining the Russian military capability."

The Ukrainian strikes on munitions storage sites have caught the Russian army off guard, forcing it to move materiel to scattered locations farther from combat areas, lengthening supply lines, reducing the Russian edge in firepower and helping to slow Russia's offensive in the east.

"They've got to get everything out to smaller, more dispersed stockpiles," said Justin Crump, a former British tank commander who heads Sibylline, a strategic advisory firm. "These are all real irritants that slow Russia down. They've suffered the hit to the tempo of artillery fire, which was really key before."

Crump said the Russian military had underestimated the threat posed by HIMARS and had left their ammunition depots exposed in known locations. "They thought their air defense would shoot down the missiles. And it didn't really," he said.

In a series of attacks that helped boost the country's morale, the Ukrainians repeatedly used HIMARS to strike a key bridge across the Dnieper River in the Kherson region, cutting traffic across it and raising potential supply problems for Russian forces in the area.

Zhdanov, the Ukrainian military analyst, described the bridge as the key link for supplying Russian forces on the right bank of the Dnieper.

Russia still can use a second crossing on the Dnieper to ferry supplies and reinforcements to its troops in Kherson, which lies just north of the Crimean Peninsula, seized by Russia in 2014. But Ukraine's strikes have shown Russia's vulnerability and weakened its hold on the region.

"The Russians have the river at their back. That's not a great place to be defending," Crump said. "They can't get supplies easily. The morale is probably quite low at this point on that side of the river."

He said Ukraine eventually may launch a massive counterattack involving large numbers of troops and weapons.

"That's the opportunity for Ukraine, I think, to land a sort of more smashing blow on the Russians and push them back," Crump said. "I think there's more chance of that being tried here than we've seen at any other point."

Crump noted that the mere prospect of a major Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south helped Kyiv by forcing the Russians to divert some of their forces from the main battleground in the east.

"That's slowing down the Donbas offensive," Crump said. "So even the threat of an offensive is actually succeeding for Ukraine at the moment."

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HEADLINE	07/31 Hurdles remain in proposed prisoner swap
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/proposed-prisoner-swap-quickly-free-detainees-russia-analysis/story?id=87373310
GIST	<p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken's announcement that the U.S. had put a "substantial offer" on the table for Russia aimed at bringing home two Americans imprisoned in Russia -- WNBA star Brittney Griner and former Marine Paul Whelan -- was an exceedingly rare disclosure in the world of hostage diplomacy, where almost nothing is revealed until a deal is done. The revelation that convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout had been offered up as part of a prisoner swap only intensified speculation that the detainees might soon be on their way home.</p> <p>But despite these developments, and Blinken restarting direct discussions with his Russian counterpart on Friday -- their first interaction since the outbreak of war in Ukraine -- experts caution there is still likely a long way to go before Griner and Whelan are released.</p> <p>Trial delay</p> <p>While Griner has been in Russian detention since February on drug charges and pleaded guilty, she has yet to be convicted of a crime. Although a guilty verdict is all but assured, Russia has consistently signaled that it wants to see its legal process play out before brokering any kind of agreement.</p> <p>"That's what is required under Russian law," said William Pomeranz, the director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute for advanced research on Russia and Eurasia. "It's required that there has to be a final judgement."</p>

Pomeranz cautions that there are "always loopholes" in the country's legal system, but says that Moscow wants to appear to have held out until after her sentencing before making a determination on a prisoner exchange or similar agreement.

Griner's trial began in early July, and Russian court watchers have predicted it could conclude before the end of summer. But there is no clearly set timeline and her preliminary detention has already been authorized through Dec. 20.

That's not the kind of control you want your adversary to have if you're a negotiator.

"If the Russians want to delay, they can do so. It will be up to the Russian court as to how fast and expedited a decision is made," Pomeranz said.

A numbers game

This spring, the Biden administration conducted its first prisoner swap, exchanging Russian citizen and convicted drug trafficker Konstantin Yaroshenko for another former U.S. Marine, Trevor Reed.

While Reed's return home was welcomed, he and many others questioned why Whelan -- who has already been locked away in Russia for over three years on espionage charges the U.S. government has called "trumped up" -- was left behind.

On Thursday, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price declined to say whether the U.S. would take part in a deal that saw only Whelan or Griner freed, but it comes as no surprise that the offer put forward by the administration seeks a package deal.

However, even though the allegations against Griner wouldn't even amount to a misdemeanor in the U.S. and the government says the case against Whelan is fabricated, Russia will likely expect more than Bout -- or any individual prisoner -- in return.

"The Russians will want to have equivalency," said Pomeranz. "So if there are two Americans who are being proposed for a swap, the Russians will insist on two Russians in American custody."

This means the Biden administration would have to sweeten the deal -- and open itself up to more criticism for letting Russian criminals walk free.

And while Moscow might say Bout is a high priority, former Defense and State Department official and ABC News contributor Col. Steve Ganyard says in reality, he isn't.

"He is not a spy who caused major damage to U.S. national security," Ganyard said. "They get more mileage out of poking a finger in the United States' eye, and more importantly, making the White House look desperate."

Publicity push?

The very revelation that the administration offered Moscow a deal may speak best to that desperation.

"A sensitive negotiation isn't made public before it's done if it's going well," said Ganyard. "Publicizing the offer is a way of deflecting U.S. domestic pressure, but it's actually hurting the White House negotiating position by admitting frustration and a weak hand."

Price admitted on Thursday it was evident that the deal had not been received as U.S. diplomats had hoped given the amount of time that had passed since the offer was first made.

"We believe that now that this message, this substantial proposal, has been conveyed directly and repeatedly through appropriate channels in recent weeks -- of course without resolution," he said.

	<p>"The fact that now, several weeks later, we are where we are, I think you can read into that as being a reflection of the fact that this has not moved to the extent we would like," Price added.</p> <p>So far, the Russians have given no public indication that they are ready to seriously engage.</p> <p>"Unless there is some behind-the-scenes movement we don't know about, Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan will continue to be pawns in a drawn-out negotiation," said Ganyard.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Kentucky flood death toll expected to rise
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/26-dead-devastating-kentucky-flooding-expected-governor/story?id=87705278
GIST	<p>The death toll in the devastating flooding that hit eastern Kentucky is continuing to rise as more rain threatens the region, according to officials.</p> <p>A total of 28 people have been confirmed dead, but that number is expected to increase again, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear announced Sunday afternoon. The death toll includes at least four children, Beshear said on Saturday.</p> <p>"We do know of additional bodies that have been recovered but we cannot confirm those deaths at this time," Beshear said in a recorded video posted online.</p> <p>Beshear described "widespread damage" that displaced thousands of people, including power outages for thousands of people as well as washed out roads, destroyed homes and flooded schools. Beshear is expected to visit some of the regions impacted by the flooding on Sunday.</p> <p>More rain is forecast in the area on Sunday and Monday as search and rescue teams continue to look for those who are unaccounted for. The additional precipitation could potentially cause water levels to rise again, with 2 inches to 4 inches of rain possible in the same area that experienced the catastrophic flooding that began with heavy rains on Wednesday.</p> <p>More than 600 people have been rescued by aircraft and boat since the flooding began, Beshear said.</p> <p>The destruction in Kentucky is the latest extreme flooding event to take place in the U.S. in less than a week.</p> <p>Heavy downpours caused flash flooding in Las Vegas on Friday, with rising waters seen on roadways and parking garages in busy parts of Sin City.</p> <p>The megadrought has caused the soil in the region to become so dry that it could not absorb the heavy rains, which helped to contribute to the flooding.</p> <p>Earlier in the week, a flash flooding emergency occurred near St. Louis, which had a record-breaking 8.56 inches of rain in less than 24 hours. One person was found dead in a car on Tuesday after the water began to recede, officials said.</p> <p>Kentucky is working to establish shelters, Beshear said, asking those who want to help to donate cleaning supplies or water. Last week, President Joe Biden approved a disaster declaration.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Contaminants, issues: baby formula plants
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/infant-formula-makers-abbott-faced-cronobacter-contamination-operational/story?id=87268233
GIST	Some of the operational deficiencies that helped trigger the massive shutdown of Abbott Nutrition's infant formula plant earlier this year have also been found at some other companies' factories, according to an

ABC News investigation of some of the other formula makers that have stepped in to help fill empty American grocery shelves in the midst of the [critical nationwide shortage](#).

The pathogen that prompted those concerns, *Cronobacter sakazakii*, can be widely found in the environment -- but in infants, it can be deadly.

Its discovery inside Abbott's Sturgis, Michigan, plant prompted a [massive voluntary formula recall](#) in February, after four babies who had consumed Abbott's formula contracted a *Cronobacter* infection. Two of the infants subsequently died, although Abbott maintains there has not been conclusive evidence that its formula caused the infant illnesses, since none of the *Cronobacter* strains found at their plant matched the two samples genetically sequenced from the sickened infants.

Ultimately, it was the combined findings of *Cronobacter* inside Abbott's plant -- along with a pattern of serious operational deficiencies and consumer complaints -- which led to its closure.

Abbott's shutdown ricocheted across the country, exacerbating the supply shortage and forcing families to scramble for alternatives in the hyper-concentrated formula market. In the wake of Abbott's recall, other companies jumped in to ramp up manufacturing to help mitigate the strain.

Yet within the last five years, those companies -- Reckitt's Mead Johnson, Gerber, and Perrigo's PBM -- have also not been immune to operational and even contamination-related concerns.

Nearly a decade's worth of FDA inspections obtained through the regulatory intelligence company Redica Systems and reviewed by ABC News have found the presence of *Cronobacter* in environmental sampling, in critical and high-hygiene areas, and even in finished product from some of these formula manufacturers' American plants.

In some cases, investigators found crucial equipment in a state that could nurture the spread of potentially dangerous pathogens, according to inspection reports.

'Rigorously managing the environment'

Cronobacter is exceptionally hardy, experts say. It is also "fairly common" in places like soil -- but that's exactly why "rigorously managing the environment" in formula factories and "taking proactive steps to prevent pathogens from creeping into our foods" are particularly important, food safety expert Scott Faber told ABC News.

Akin to a restaurant health inspector, the FDA performs no-notice inspections of U.S. manufacturing facilities to ensure companies are complying with manufacturing and cleanliness standards; they also perform inspections when alerted by a company that product contamination has been found -- or when consumer complaints prompt a for-cause probe into whether the company is upholding an acceptable standard.

ABC News has reviewed FDA inspection documents for the three other domestic companies which, along with Abbott, have been responsible for roughly 90% of the country's formula market.

The right set of circumstances can compound a perfect storm of risk factors for potentially dangerous pathogens to survive, experts say -- and that's especially worrisome when a contaminant like *Cronobacter* lurks where food is made for babies, who are among those most vulnerable to that germ.

"Especially for sensitive populations, that quality control is so important. You don't want contamination to rise to a level where it becomes a problem," Dr. Amy Edwards, a pediatrician and associate medical director for infection control at UH Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Ohio, told ABC News. "That's why inspections are meant to be incredibly invasive -- we have to get close enough to zero contamination levels to be safe."

Mead Johnson

In August 2021, FDA investigators made a routine visit to Mead Johnson's plant in Evansville, Indiana, where it has operated for more than a century. An inspection report notifying the company's management of objectionable conditions, called a Form 483, was issued, after investigators found the plant's data wasn't recorded frequently enough to ensure proper sterility of their product.

FDA investigators said that company records indicated *Cronobacter* was found in one of the plant's rooms, and that the area was subsequently sanitized. A plant operator was observed not washing his hands between glove changes, and not changing his gloves between touching non-food and food contact surfaces.

The employee was subsequently retrained, Mead Johnson told the FDA, according to inspection documents. But it was not the first time investigators had flagged concerns at one of Mead Johnson's plants.

In late 2017, seven investigators visited Mead Johnson's plant in Zeeland, Michigan, after the company had alerted the FDA that two finished batches of Enfamil formula -- batches that had already been exported from the country -- tested positive for *Cronobacter*. An FDA inspection revealed that *Cronobacter* had been found "in critical and high hygiene areas of the processing environment on 26 occasions" between mid-January and late August of 2017, documents obtained by ABC News show.

FDA investigators also said they found *Cronobacter* specifically in areas that risked leading to "potential contamination" of "food contact surfaces."

The potential problems the FDA discovered at the plant were addressed in time for later inspections -- but food safety experts told ABC News these issues can become a serious problem if not immediately dealt with.

"*Cronobacter* is an environmental pathogen -- it's everywhere," food safety attorney Bill Marler said. "But it's really, really bad to have it in infant formula."

Mead Johnson's plant had "multiple wall leaks," nonconformity reports reviewed by the FDA said, as well as "equipment condensation" in areas where positive *Cronobacter* samples were later found.

"Leaks are the bane of infection control," Edwards said. "Water is life; if you're not controlling your water, then you are not controlling your bacteria."

The Zeeland facility submitted a corrective action plan, promising "increased frequency of cleaning the areas where positive results were identified, evaluation and inspection of equipment" and "repairs to equipment and the facility as needed."

FDA investigators followed up with the Zeeland plant in spring 2018. The facility had retooled its sanitization procedures, implemented dryer inspections, and made repairs to flooring, water infiltration, and caulking.

Returning in March 2019, investigators noted the plant's environmental monitoring program had identified and mitigated several instances of *Cronobacter* in various areas of the plant.

In a statement to ABC News, Reckitt, of which Mead Johnson is a division, maintained that the company manufactures their formula "using the highest standards for quality and safety," adding that whenever the FDA finds an issue they "immediately develop and implement an action plan to address the issue."

Reckitt said they "regularly review and enhance" their facilities' manufacturing processes "and invest in new technologies and equipment," adding that their "robust operating protocols meet or exceed the highest regulatory standards," which they employed while "safely" increasing infant formula amid the shortage.

An FDA spokesperson, when asked for comment regarding their investigators' findings of Cronobacter at multiple formula companies' facilities, said the agency "takes its responsibility seriously" to ensure the rigorous safety of American foods, and that the agency is reexamining whether more can be done.

Based on a "close look at recent and historical findings" from inspections, the FDA spokesperson said, "We will be looking at what additional strategies could be employed to better prevent microbial contamination during the production of powdered infant formula," adding the agency is "conducting an evaluation" of their response to the formula crisis "to determine what additional steps should be taken to ensure the maximum effectiveness of agency programs and policies related to infant formula and medical food."

Nevertheless, said the spokesperson, "It is important to note that it's a firm's responsibility to ensure the consistent quality and safety of the products they produce."

"We are most interested in how aggressively a firm addresses and responds to potential contamination," the FDA spokesperson said.

Steven Lynn, the former director of the FDA's pharmaceutical Office of Manufacturing and Product Quality, told ABC News that manufacturers' oversight "must be robust to assure no adulterated product reaches the vulnerable infant population they serve."

"It sounds easy, but it's not," said Lynn, an expert on good manufacturing practices. "Problems can and do occur. That's a fact of life."

Lynn, who reviewed the inspection documents obtained by ABC News, noted that there appear to be "problematic similarities" among some of the formula manufacturers' lapses in quality control, including "issues with inadequate process controls, including cleaning, sampling and ultimately controlling the production environment to assure there is no microbial contamination," he said.

Lynn said that FDA investigators did what they were supposed to do: identify deficiencies for the companies to fix.

"The key is making sure the issues are thoroughly investigated, and then implementing robust solutions to correct and prevent them from reoccurring in the future," in order to ensure that "safe formula is on the market," Lynn said.

Gerber

In August 2021, FDA investigators made a routine visit to Nestlé Nutrition's Gateway facility in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, which makes Gerber products. They found "dirty scoops used during the previous production day" lying on a stainless steel table in one of the raw material rooms, and "debris" on the floor.

It was determined that some cleaning activities were resulting in water getting "trapped in cracks in the floor" and "onto equipment located on lower decks."

In addition, Cronobacter was detected in an in-process powder sample of infant formula.

The finished lot of that product was immediately destroyed.

FDA investigators discussed their findings and suggested remedies with management, but did not issue a Form 483 at that time, according to inspection documents reviewed by ABC News.

A Gerber spokesperson told ABC News that their infant formulas go through up to 500 quality and safety checks, "many of which are above and beyond regulatory requirements."

"If we find Cronobacter or any other contaminant in the product, that is when we take the most extreme reaction," Scott Fitz, Vice President of Technical & Production for Gerber told ABC News.

"All the product in that batch is blocked, and all the batches around that product are blocked," he said, adding that the company thoroughly investigates the contaminant's origins and destroys any impacted product.

"Given the sensitive consumer we're dealing with, we can't take the chance of it getting to shelf," Fitz said. "This isn't about regulation, it's about doing what's right."

PBM Nutritionals

After a routine visit in August 2019, the FDA issued a Form 483 identifying a cold storage temperature regulation deficiency at the Milton, Vermont, plant of PBM Nutritionals, a subsidiary of Perrigo, which makes store-brand formulas for retailers like Walmart and Amazon.

Investigators found that some of the facility's data was not specific enough "to ensure there is no significant growth of microorganisms of public health significance" in their storage tanks. Documents provided by the company to the FDA noted a recent roof leak had overwhelmed the drainage system, and that, upon inspection, environmental sample swabs tested positive for Cronobacter before additional cleaning.

In a statement to ABC News, Perrigo said they are "proud" of their compliance track record, adding that the Cronobacter within the plant had been found by their own self-monitoring, rather than by FDA investigators.

"Our facilities in Vermont and Ohio are in good regulatory standing and remain compliant with all FDA processes and procedures," they said.

Perrigo said they had hired independent experts "a few years ago" to "enhance" their manufacturing processes and protective measures. The company said the experts found their "aging equipment could lead to concerns in the future," so they invested approximately \$110 million in improving formula plant quality, and hired an additional 100 quality and sanitation personnel.

Perrigo said that they had addressed the FDA's observation regarding cold storage.

"Our quality control process is a continuous improvement process, and any concerns found are promptly addressed," the company said.

"Everybody knows what the persistent problems are that cause bacterial contamination in product," said Marler, the food safety attorney. "It's cracks, water, old equipment. It's when companies stop realizing they're producing food that is going into the bodies of babies and they start thinking about it as a widget, as a commodity."

Patrick Stone, a former FDA investigator, says factories that make infant formula should be held to a higher quality-control standard than other mass market food products. But too often, he said, "it actually takes an outbreak or something to happen before people wake up and say 'Why is this happening?'"

Abbott Nutrition

After inspecting Abbott's Sturgis facility earlier this year, FDA chief Dr. Robert Califf described the "shocking" and "egregiously unsanitary conditions" investigators had found.

"Standing water; cracks in the key equipment that present the potential for bacterial contamination to persist, particularly in the presence of moisture; leaks on the roof; a previous citation for inadequate hand washing," Califf testified before Congress in May. "Many signs of a disappointing lack of attention to the culture of safety, in this product that is so essential to the lives of our most precious people."

Investigators discovered five strains of Cronobacter from environmental sampling of Abbott's plant, and Abbott ultimately agreed to shutter the facility and recall the formula.

Food safety experts ABC spoke with emphasized the importance of establishing -- and adhering to -- a proactive protocol for rooting out risk factors, before they snowball.

"You don't wait for the accident to happen before you build a stoplight," said Faber, the food safety expert. "You probe your factory for where pathogens could be lurking, and then adopt critical controls to eradicate them.

"If we're seeing any of the conditions found at Sturgis in other plants, we need to ask whether that philosophy has been sufficiently embraced," he said.

"Abbott has a zero-tolerance policy for Cronobacter in our plants, which is why we took the steps we did at Sturgis," an Abbott spokesperson said. "Our highest priority is getting babies safe, quality formula they need."

Further complicating the matter is that Cronobacter infection is listed as a reportable illness by only one U.S. state: Minnesota, where the first of the four infants was reported infected after consuming Abbott's formula last September.

Because there are no national requirements that Cronobacter be reported, doctors and labs are not required to report cases to their local health department -- which leaves the FDA to rely on consumer complaints and health care providers for on-the-ground data regarding infections.

"Until you increase that oversight, you're going to limp from mini-outbreak to mini-outbreak," Marler said.

A 'stringent enough' system?

In August 2017, a few months before the FDA found Cronobacter inside Mead Johnson's Zeeland plant, a two-week old infant from Illinois was declared brain dead after being diagnosed with a Cronobacter infection. The infant had consumed "multiple lots of Enfamil Newborn Premium ready-to-feed liquid milk product at the hospital, and some product was sent home with the parents," FDA inspection reports say.

But FDA sampling of the available formula was negative for Cronobacter.

Reckitt told ABC News they "cooperate fully with the FDA to investigate consumer complaints," underscoring that their formula had never conclusively been proven as the cause of an illness.

In the case of Abbott, too, no conclusive causation has been proven between the Cronobacter found at the Sturgis plant and infants' illness or death. Nevertheless, FDA chief Califf noted in congressional testimony that "we cannot rule it out either, as the confluence of events is highly unusual. There is no dispute that the facility was unacceptably unsanitary."

"There is some room for human error, but not for persistent human error," said Edwards, the pediatrician. "You have to have your process in place. And you have to have a process for monitoring your process to make sure it's always being followed."

When several controls fail at once, it risks prompting an unfortunate domino effect and "raises important questions about whether our current regulatory system is stringent enough," Faber said.

The FDA spokesperson told ABC News that the agency is assessing whether their annual surveillance inspections of formula facilities should include more environmental sampling going forward, albeit in a way that "minimizes any disruptions to the supply chain."

In June, ABC News was first to report that the Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General had [launched an audit](#) into how the FDA responded leading up to the recall and closure of Abbott's Sturgis plant.

	<p>The CDC says Cronobacter infections are rare, but serious in infants -- noting that powdered formula can be contaminated at a processing facility, or at home. Because Cronobacter can survive so well -- on kitchen counters, on sinks, or in a manufacturing plant -- the CDC recommends that families using formula wash hands frequently around infants, thoroughly clean bottles, and safely store any powdered formula, or, if possible, use liquid formula.</p> <p>"There are babies out there whose lives depend on formula. So what happens when the thing that you're giving your baby is actually the thing that makes them sick?" Edwards said. "That is incredibly scary. For parents, for all of us."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Monkeypox continues to spread in WA
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/monkeypox-what-to-know-about-the-disease-and-its-status-in-wa/
GIST	<p>Monkeypox is continuing to spread in Washington, with cases roughly doubling each week. As of late July, 109 cases were identified statewide.</p> <p>Currently, a majority of the confirmed cases in Washington are through local transmission, rather than contact with travel, the state Department of Health said. King County, the state's most populous area, has about 90% of the cases.</p> <p>Monkeypox is a viral zoonosis, a disease transmitted to humans from animals, with symptoms similar to smallpox, albeit less severe.</p> <p>Endemic to Central and West Africa, monkeypox has been spreading rapidly and widely since May through human-to-human transmission — especially sexual contact — in countries where it is uncommon. On July 23, with over 3,000 cases detected in 47 countries, the World Health Organization declared it a global emergency.</p> <p>Rising community spread of the virus is now the real concern, said Dr. Shireesha Dhanireddy, an infectious disease expert at UW Medicine. She added that greater local access to testing may also contribute to the growing number of cases.</p> <p>In early July, UW Medicine's virology lab, the largest genomic sequencing lab in the state, became one of the few in the country to establish PCR testing for monkeypox.</p> <p>How does monkeypox spread? Who is getting infected?</p> <p>Monkeypox can affect anyone — regardless of gender or sexual orientation — who has close contact with an infected person.</p> <p>This may include direct contact, sexual or not, with respiratory secretions, skin lesions or body fluids of an infected person or contact with virus-contaminated objects like dishes, utensils, clothing, bedding or electronics.</p> <p>Following current global trends, cases in Washington so far have been concentrated among men who have sex with men, and those with multiple partners. Previous outbreaks did not disproportionately affect men who have sex with men. Health care professionals are working to address this new trend without discriminating or stigmatizing.</p> <p>"I saw my first case in late May and started treatment then and since Pride weekend, I feel like we've had a significant growth in the number of cases," Dhanireddy said.</p> <p>It is not clear if monkeypox can be sexually transmitted. The CDC are still investigating if the virus could be present in semen, vaginal fluids or fecal matter.</p>

The risk is more prevalent in places where there is close, intimate skin-to-skin contact, regardless of sexual orientation, Dhanireddy said. Open-mouth kissing also raised the risk of exposure.

“Rather than saying it’s all gay men, or queer or transgender, it’s really thinking about the epidemiologic risk in those kinds of sexual contact events and just the sheer number of partners meaning higher risk of exposure,” Dhanireddy said.

People with multiple sex partners in the last few months are at greater risk of exposure.

”If you have had more than 10 partners in the past three months, and if you’ve had gonorrhea or syphilis, indicating you’ve got a high risk of exposure, those are also risk factors,” Dhanireddy said.

Just as infected animals can spread the monkeypox virus to people, it is possible infected people can spread the virus to animals through close contact. This includes petting, cuddling or sleeping on the same bed.

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Where monkeypox is spreading in Washington

While the monkeypox virus has been predominantly spreading in and around the Puget Sound region, cases are also being detected in the southwest counties of Lewis, Clark and Cowlitz and central/east counties of Yakima and Benton.

County, County population, Number of cases

King (2,317,700 residents)

96

Pierce (937,400 residents)

3

Snohomish (847,300 residents)

2

Clark (520,900 residents)

2

Benton (212,300 residents)

1

Cowlitz (112,350 residents)

1

Kitsap (280,900 residents)

1

Lewis (83,400 residents)

1

Yakima (259,950 residents)

1

Non-WA resident

1

Data as of July 29, 2022

HEADLINE	07/31 Seattle, Portland set heat duration records
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Seattle-Portland-set-heat-duration-records-17341816.php
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — Seattle and Portland, Oregon, set records Sunday for most consecutive days of high temperatures and authorities in Oregon investigated more possible heat-related deaths.</p> <p>In Seattle, the temperature rose to 91 Fahrenheit (32.8 Celsius) by early afternoon, the record sixth straight day the mercury rose above 90 F (32.2 C). In Portland, Oregon, on Sunday temperatures rose above 95 F (35 C) for the seventh day in a row, a record for the city for consecutive days above that mark.</p> <p>In Oregon, the state Medical Examiner's Office said Sunday it was investigating 10 deaths as possibly heat related. In the Portland area temperatures have risen above 100 F (37.8 C) several times over the past week.</p> <p>Officials in Portland said they would keep cooling shelters open through Sunday night.</p> <p>The National Weather Service issued an excessive heat warning for both the Portland and Seattle, Washington, regions lasting through late Sunday evening. Temperatures were expected to cool beginning Monday as colder air from the Pacific blows in.</p> <p>Climate change is fueling longer heat waves in the Pacific Northwest, a region where weeklong heat spells were historically rare, according to climate experts.</p> <p>Residents and officials in the Northwest have been trying to adjust to the likely reality of longer, hotter heat waves following last summer's deadly "heat dome" weather phenomenon that prompted record temperatures and deaths.</p> <p>About 800 people died in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia during that heat wave, which hit in late June and early July of 2021. The temperature hit an all-time high of 116 F (46.7 C) in Portland.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Russian strikes hit southern Ukraine port
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-invites-un-red-cross-experts-probe-ukraine-jail-deaths-2022-07-31/
GIST	<p>KYIV, July 31 (Reuters) - Heavy Russian strikes hit the southern Ukrainian port city of Mykolaiv overnight and early on Sunday, killing the owner of one of the country's largest grain producing and exporting companies, the local governor said.</p> <p>Oleksiy Vadatursky, founder and owner of agriculture company Nibulon and his wife, were killed in their home, Mykolaiv Governor Vitaliy Kim said on Telegram.</p> <p>Headquartered in Mykolaiv, a strategically important city that borders the Russia-occupied Kherson region, Nibulon specializes in the production and export of wheat, barley and corn, and it has its own fleet and shipyard.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelenskiy described Vadatursky's death as "a great loss for all of Ukraine", saying in a statement the businessman had been in the process of building a modern grain market involving a network of transshipment terminals and elevators.</p> <p>Three people were also wounded in the attacks on Mikolaiv, the city's Mayor Oleksandr Senkevych told Ukrainian television, adding 12 missiles had hit homes and educational facilities. He earlier described the strikes as "probably the most powerful" on the city of the entire five-month-old war.</p>

Up to 50 Grad rockets hit residential areas in another southern city, Nikopol, on Sunday morning, Dnipropetrovsk Governor Valentyn Reznichenko wrote on Telegram. One person was wounded.

Ukrainian forces struck the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Russian-held Sevastopol early on Sunday, the Crimean port city governor, Mikhail Razvozhayev told Russian media. Five members of staff were wounded in the attack when what was presumed to be a drone flew into the courtyard at the headquarters, he said.

Reuters could not independently verify the battlefield reports.

The Sevastopol attack coincided with Russia's Navy Day, which President Vladimir Putin marked by announcing that the Russian navy would receive what he called "formidable" hypersonic Zircon cruise missiles in coming months. Those missiles can travel at nine times the speed of sound. [read more](#)

He did not mention Ukraine directly.

Putin sent tens of thousands of troops over the border on Feb. 24, setting off a conflict that has killed thousands, uprooted millions and caused a deep strain in relations between Russia and the West.

The biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two has also stoked an energy and food crisis that is shaking the global economy. Both Ukraine and Russia are leading suppliers of grain.

HARVEST COULD BE HALVED

Zelenskiy said on Sunday the country may harvest only half its usual amount this year due to the invasion.

"Ukrainian harvest this year is under the threat to be twice less," suggesting half as much as usual, Zelenskiy wrote in English on Twitter. "Our main goal — to prevent global food crisis caused by Russian invasion. Still grains find a way to be delivered alternatively," he added.

Ukraine has struggled to get its product to buyers via its Black Sea ports because of the war.

But an agreement signed under the stewardship of the United Nations and Turkey on July 22 provides for safe passage for ships carrying grain out of three southern Ukrainian ports.

There is a high possibility that the first grain-exporting ship will leave Ukraine's ports on Monday, a spokesperson for Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday. [read more](#)

EASTERN DANGER

In a televised address late on Saturday, Zelenskiy said hundreds of thousands of people were still exposed to fierce fighting in the Donbas region, which contains Donetsk and Luhansk provinces and which Russia seeks to control completely. Swathes of the Donbas were held before the invasion by Russian-backed separatists.

"Many refuse to leave but it still needs to be done," Zelenskiy said. "The more people leave the Donetsk region now, the fewer people the Russian army will have time to kill."

Russia on Sunday invited U.N. and Red Cross experts to probe the deaths of dozens of Ukrainian prisoners held by Moscow-backed separatists.

Ukraine and Russia have traded accusations over a missile strike or explosion early on Friday that appeared to have killed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war in the front-line town of Olenivka in eastern Donetsk.

Russia invited experts from the U.N. and Red Cross to probe the deaths "in the interests of conducting an objective investigation", the defence ministry said on Sunday.

	<p>The ministry had published a list of 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war killed and 73 wounded in what it said was a Ukrainian military strike with a U.S.-made High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).</p> <p>Ukraine's armed forces denied responsibility, saying Russian artillery had attacked the prison to hide mistreatment there.</p> <p>Reuters journalists confirmed some of the deaths at the prison, but could not immediately verify the differing versions of events.</p> <p>Russia denies its forces have deliberately attacked civilians or committed war crimes in the invasion, which it calls a "special operation".</p> <p>Ukraine's military said on Saturday more than 100 Russian soldiers had been killed and seven tanks destroyed in the south on Friday, including the Kherson region that is the focus of Kyiv's counteroffensive in that part of the country and a key link in Moscow's supply lines.</p> <p>Rail traffic to Kherson over the Dnipro River had been cut, the military said, potentially further isolating Russian forces west of the river from supplies in occupied Crimea and the east.</p> <p>Officials from the Russian-appointed administration running the Kherson region last week rejected Western and Ukrainian assessments that Russian forces there were now vulnerable.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 West wildfires explode in size by heat, wind
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-california-montana-idaho-evacuations-9d1a067869c3e002c07cac5b2ffe532c
GIST	<p>SAN DIEGO (AP) — Wildfires in California and Montana exploded in size overnight amid windy, hot conditions and were quickly encroaching on neighborhoods, forcing evacuation orders for over 100 homes Saturday, while an Idaho blaze was spreading.</p> <p>In California's Klamath National Forest, the fast-moving McKinney fire, which started Friday, went from charring just over 1 square mile (1 square kilometer) to scorching as much as 62 square miles (160 square kilometers) by Saturday in a largely rural area near the Oregon state line, according to fire officials. The fire burned down at least a dozen residences and wildlife was seen fleeing the area to avoid the flames.</p> <p>"It's continuing to grow with erratic winds and thunderstorms in the area and we're in triple digit temperatures," said Caroline Quintanilla, a spokeswoman at Klamath National Forest.</p> <p>California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency Saturday as the fire intensified. The proclamation allows Newsom more flexibility to make emergency response and recovery effort decisions and access federal aid.</p> <p>It also allows "firefighting resources from other states to assist California crews in battling the fires," according to a statement from the governor's office.</p> <p>Meanwhile in Montana, the Elmo wildfire nearly tripled in size to more than 11 square miles (about 28 square kilometers) within a few miles of the town of Elmo. Roughly 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the south, Idaho residents remained under evacuation orders as the Moose Fire in the Salmon-Challis National Forest charred more than 67.5 square miles (174.8 square kilometers) in timbered land near the town of Salmon. It was 17% contained.</p> <p>A significant build-up of vegetation was fueling the McKinney fire, said Tom Stokesberry, a spokesman with the U.S. Forest Service for the region.</p>

“It’s a very dangerous fire — the geography there is steep and rugged, and this particular area hasn’t burned in a while,” he said.

A small fire was also burning nearby, outside the town of Seiad, Stokesberry said. With lightning predicted over the next few days, resources from all over California were being brought in to help fight the region’s fires, he said.

McKinney’s explosive growth forced crews to shift from trying to control the perimeter of the blaze to trying to protect homes and critical infrastructure like water tanks and power lines, and assist in evacuations in California’s northernmost county of Siskiyou.

Deputies and law enforcement were knocking on doors in the county seat of Yreka and the town of Fort Jones to urge residents to get out and safely evacuate their livestock onto trailers. Automated calls were being sent to land phone lines as well because there were areas without cell phone service.

Over 100 homes were ordered evacuated and authorities were warning people to be on high alert. Smoke from the fire caused the closure of portions of Highway 96.

The Pacific Coast Trail Association urged hikers to get to the nearest town while the U.S. Forest Service closed a 110-mile (177-kilometer) section of the trail from the Etna Summit to the Mt. Ashland Campground in southern Oregon.

Oregon state Rep. Dacia Grayber, who is a firefighter, was camping with her husband, who is also in the fire service, near the California state line when gale-force winds awoke them just after midnight.

The sky was glowing with strikes of lightening in the clouds, while ash was blowing at them, though they were in Oregon, about 10 miles (about 16 kilometers) away. Intense heat from the fire had sent up a massive pyrocumulonimbus cloud, which can produce its own weather system including winds and thunderstorms, Grayber said.

“These were some of the worst winds I’ve ever been in and we’re used to big fires,” she said. “I thought it was going to rip the roof top tent off of our truck. We got the heck out of there.”

On their way out, they came across hikers on the Pacific Coast Trail fleeing to safety.

“The terrifying part for us was the wind velocity,” she said. “It went from a fairly cool breezy night to hot, dry hurricane-force winds. Usually that happens with a fire during the day but not at night. I hope for everyone’s sake this dies down but it’s looking like it’s going to get worse.”

In western Montana, the wind-driven Elmo fire forced evacuations of homes and livestock as it raced across grass and timber, according to The National Interagency Fire Center, based in Idaho. The agency estimated it would take nearly a month to contain the blaze.

Smoke shut down a portion of Highway 28 between Hot Springs and Elmo because of the thick smoke, according to the Montana Department of Transportation.

Crews from several different agencies were fighting the fire on Saturday, including the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Fire Division. Six helicopters were making drops on the fire, aided by 22 engines on the ground.

In Idaho, more than 930 wildland firefighters and support staff were battling the Moose fire Saturday and protecting homes, energy infrastructure and the Highway 93 corridor, a major north-south route.

A red flag warning indicated that the weather could make things worse with the forecast calling for “dry thunderstorms,” with lightning, wind and no rain.

	<p>In Hawaii, fire crews and helicopters have been fighting flames Saturday evening on Maui near Paia Bay. The Maui County Emergency Management Agency said roads have been closed and have advised residents and travelers to avoid the area. It is unclear how many acres have burned. A red flag warning is in effect Sunday.</p> <p>Meanwhile, crews made significant progress in battling another major blaze in California that forced evacuations of thousands of people near Yosemite National Park earlier this month. The Oak fire was 52% contained by Saturday, according to a Cal Fire incident update.</p> <p>As fires raged across the West, the U.S. House on Friday approved wide-ranging legislation aimed at helping communities in the region cope with increasingly severe wildfires and drought — fueled by climate change — that have caused billions of dollars in damage to homes and businesses in recent years.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Anti-Iran protesters remain Iraq parliament
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iraq-clerics-followers-camped-parliament-2nd-day-87702567
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD -- With mattresses strewn about, food trucked in and protesters playacting as lawmakers, hundreds of followers of an influential Shiite cleric were camped out Sunday inside the Iraqi parliament after toppling security walls around the building and storming in the previous day.</p> <p>The protesters — followers of cleric Muqtada al-Sadr — pledged to hold an open-ended sit-in to derail efforts by their rivals from Iran-backed political groups to form the country's next government. Their demands are lofty: early elections, constitutional amendments and the ouster of al-Sadr's rivals.</p> <p>The developments have catapulted Iraq's politics to center stage, plunging the country deeper into a political crisis as a power struggle unfolds between the two major Shiite groups.</p> <p>On Sunday, the sit-in appeared more of a joyous celebration than a political protest — al-Sadr's followers were dancing, praying and chanting slogans inside the parliament, in praise of their leader. In between, they took naps on mattresses lining the grand halls.</p> <p>It was a scene starkly different from the one on Saturday, when protesters used ropes and chains to topple cement walls around the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, then flooded into the assembly building. It was the second such breach last week, but this time they did not disperse peacefully.</p> <p>Iraqi security forces fired tear gas and stun grenades at first, to try to repel the demonstrators. The Ministry of Health said about 125 people were injured in the violence — 100 protesters and 25 members of the security forces. Within a few hours, the police backed off, leaving the parliament to the protesters.</p> <p>The takeover of the parliament showed al-Sadr was using his large grassroots following as a pressure tactic against his rivals in the Coordination Framework — an alliance of Shiite parties backed by Iran and lead by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki — after his party was not able to form a government despite having won the largest number of seats in the federal elections held last October.</p> <p>Neither side appears willing to concede and al-Sadr seems intent on derailing government formation efforts by the Iran-backed groups.</p> <p>But there were red-lines — the road to the judicial council building nearby was closed, with heavy security presence around it. Breaching the building would amount to a coup, and al-Sadr had ordered his followers to steer clear of it.</p> <p>The protesters appeared prepared for the long-haul — or at least an extended sit-in.</p>

Tuk-tuks, a mainstay of transportation in the impoverished Baghdad suburb of Sadr City from where the cleric derives much of his following, shuttled demonstrators to and from the parliament for a fee of 1,000 Iraqi dinars, or 60 cents.

Coolers were set up and water bottles were passed around. A child handed out sweets while teenagers sold juice from sacks. A few women — a minority in the male-dominated demonstration — swept the floors.

Outside, garbage from food packages and other trash littered the street leading up to the parliament gate while trucks brought in giant cauldrons of steaming rice and beans to feed the protesters. Signs nearby read: “Revolution Restaurant”

Al-Sadr’s portrait hung everywhere. Many protesters smoked, tossing cigarette butts on the floor as cigarette smoke filled the assembly.

A young man, Samir Aziz Abbas sold popsicles. “I am here to make a living,” he said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

One protester, Haidar Jameel assumed the seat of Parliament Speaker Mohammed Halbousi — among the most powerful political figures in Iraq — and from it, looked on at his rowdy fellow demonstrators. After al-Sadr’s followers took over the parliament, Halbousi had suspended future sessions until further notice.

“We will not back down until our demands are met,” Jameel declared.

Al-Sadr’s support base consists largely of impoverished Iraqis living in the slums of Baghdad, attracted by calls against corruption. But al-Sadr is also an establishment figure, with many civil servants appointed by his party throughout the state apparatus.

By choosing to stage his protest ahead of the Shiite Islam’s holy day of Ashura, al-Sadr capitalized on a moment when religious fervor runs high — protesters performed religious rituals inside the parliament. At midday, an imam led a prayer in the central lobby.

Ashura commemorates the killing of the Prophet Muhammed’s grandson, Imam Hussein. Iraqis typically march in the thousands to commemorate the day in the holy city of Karbala and emotions run high in the days leading up to it.

According to Shiite religious belief, one way of showing love toward Imam Hussein is to rise against oppression.

Al-Sadr’s messaging to his followers is imbued with references to the pilgrimage, said Marsin Alshamary, a post-doctoral fellow at the Brookings Institution.

For the protesters, most of them young men, the sit-in offers a chance to come close to the seat of power in a system that has long neglected them. Before, they would not have been able to enter the heavily fortified zone without permission.

When Meethak Muhi took his turn to sit in the seat of the deputy speaker of parliament, he tied himself to the chair with a scarf.

“The parliament, it’s finished,” he shouted.

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HEADLINE	07/30 China military exercise opposite Taiwan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-announces-military-exercise-opposite-taiwan-87668769

GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China said it was conducting military exercises Saturday off its coast opposite Taiwan after warning Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the U.S. House of Representatives to scrap possible plans to visit the island democracy, which Beijing claims as part of its territory.</p> <p>The ruling Communist Party's military wing, the People's Liberation Army, was conducting "live-fire exercises" near the Pingtan islands off Fujian province from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., the official Xinhua News Agency said. The Maritime Safety Administration warned ships to avoid the area.</p> <p>Such exercises usually involve artillery. The one-sentence announcement gave no indication whether Saturday's exercise also might include missiles, fighter planes or other weapons.</p> <p>Pelosi, who would be the highest-ranking American elected official to visit Taiwan since 1997, has yet to confirm whether she will go. President Xi Jinping warned his U.S. counterpart, Joe Biden, in a phone call Thursday against "external interference" in Beijing's dealings with the island.</p> <p>China says Taiwan has no right to conduct foreign relations. It sees visits by American officials as encouragement for the island to make its decades-old de facto independence official.</p> <p>The Ministry of Defense warned Washington this week not to allow Pelosi, who is Biden's equal in rank as leader of one of three branches of government, to visit Taiwan. A spokesman said the PLA would take unspecified "strong measures" to stop pro-independence activity.</p> <p>The PLA has flown growing numbers of fighter planes and bombers near Taiwan and has in the past fired missiles into shipping lanes to the island.</p> <p>Taiwan and China split in 1949 after a civil war that ended with a communist victory on the mainland.</p> <p>The two governments say they are one country but disagree over which is entitled to national leadership. They have no official relations but are linked by billions of dollars in trade and investment.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Putin targets US: new Russia navy doctrine
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/vladimir-putin-targets-us-new-russian-navy-doctrine-warns-using-hypersonic-weapons
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new naval doctrine that targets the U.S. as Russia's top global adversary.</p> <p>Putin signed the 55-page during an appearance in St. Petersburg to mark Russia's Navy Day. The Russian leader delivered a speech announcing Russia's plans to become a great maritime power, saying resisting the U.S. is a top goal.</p> <p>"The strategic policy of the USA to dominate the world's oceans" threatens Russia, Putin said.</p> <p>Putin's speech made no mention of his ongoing invasion of Ukraine, however.</p> <p>Putin went on to claim that a number of warships will soon be equipped with hypersonic weapons.</p> <p>"The key thing here is the capability of the Russian navy," Putin said. "It is able to respond with lightning speed to all who decides to infringe on our sovereignty and freedom."</p> <p>Putin also noted the expansion of NATO as a top threat to Russia, months after Sweden and Finland officially joined the Western alliance. Finland shares an 800-mile border with Russia, significantly expanding potential friction points between NATO and Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Havana faces blackouts, cancels carnival
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-07-30/havana-announces-blackouts-cancels-carnival-as-crisis-deepens
GIST	<p>HAVANA (Reuters) - The Cuban capital of Havana will begin electricity blackouts in August, has canceled carnival and is taking other measures as the country's energy crisis worsens, state media reported on Saturday.</p> <p>The capital, home to a fifth of the population of 11.2 million and center of economic activity in Cuba, had been spared the daily power outages of four or more hours that the rest of the island has endured for months.</p> <p>Blackouts have sparked a few small local protests this summer and a year ago in July fueled a day of unprecedented unrest across the country as discontent boiled over.</p> <p>For now, a schedule of power outages will mean each of Havana's six municipalities will have its electricity cut every three days during peak mid-day hours, according to the local Communist Party daily, Tribuna de la Habana, which reported on a meeting of local authorities.</p> <p>The blackouts reflect a deepening economic crisis that began with harsh new U.S. sanctions on the island in 2019 and worsened with the pandemic that gutted tourism, and then Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Soaring prices for food, fuel and shipping have exposed import dependence and vulnerabilities such as a decaying infrastructure. The country's economy declined 10.9% in 2020, recovering just 1.3% last year.</p> <p>Cubans have withstood more than two years of food and medicine shortages, long lines to purchase scarce goods, high prices and transportation woes. The blackouts have only added to the frustration, leading to an exodus of more than 150,000 Cubans since October to the United States, and more elsewhere.</p> <p>"This is the moment to show solidarity and contribute so that the rest of Cuba suffers less from the undesirable blackouts," Havana Communist Party leader Luis Antonio Torres was quoted by Tribuna as stating.</p> <p>Torres, and others at the meeting insisted they were acting in solidarity with fellow Cubans, not from necessity, and announced other measures such as mass vacations to shutter state-run companies, working from home and a 20% cut in energy allocations for private businesses with high consumption. The cancelled carnival had been due to take place next month.</p> <p>Jorge Pinon, director of the University of Texas at Austin's Latin America and Caribbean Energy and Environment Program, said offered a different assessment from Torres. He said the entire power grid was near collapse after recent fires in two of 20 already obsolete plants, with others constantly breaking down.</p> <p>"When you keep running the equipment past its capital maintenance schedule it falls into a downward spiral with no short term solution," he told Reuters.</p> <p>"The announced scheduled blackouts are not in solidarity but rather a necessity to avoid a possible total collapse of the system," Pinon said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Explosion at Russia Black Sea Fleet HQ
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-explosions-black-sea-crimea-ddf4744077bac371392763b5cd77f25d
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A drone-borne explosive device detonated Sunday at the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, injuring six people, officials said.</p> <p>The explosion at the headquarters in the city of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula that Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014 caused cancellation of observances of Russia's Navy Day holiday.</p>

The Black Sea Fleet's press service said the drone appeared to be homemade. It described the explosive device as "low-power" but Sevastopol mayor Mikhail Razvozhayev said six people were injured in the blast.

There was no immediate information on where the drone began its flight; Sevastopol is about 170 kilometers (100 miles) south of the Ukrainian mainland and Russian forces control much of the mainland area along the Black Sea.

Fighting continued elsewhere in Ukraine. The mayor of the major port city of Mykolaiv, Vitaliy Kim, said shelling killed one of Ukraine's richest men, Oleksiy Vadatursky, and his wife. Vadatursky headed a grain production and export business.

In the Sumy region in Ukraine's north, near the Russian border, shelling killed one person, the regional administration said.

Three people died in attacks over the past day in the Donetsk region, which is partly under the control of Russian separatist forces, said governor Pavlo Kyrylenko.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Sunday on Twitter that images of a prison where at least 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war died in an explosion on Friday indicated that the blast came from within the building in Olenivka, which is under Russian control.

Russian officials have claimed the building was attacked by Ukraine with the aim of silencing POWs who might be giving information about Ukrainian military operations.

Satellite photos taken before and after the attack show that a small, squarish building in the middle of the Olenivka prison complex was demolished, its roof in splinters.

Podolyak said those images and the lack of damage to adjacent structures showed that the building was not attacked from the air or by artillery and contended the evidence was consistent with a hyperbaric bomb set off inside.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Exodus from California continues
SOURCE	https://www.gazetteextra.com/news/nation_world/california-exodus-continues-with-la-san-francisco-leading-the-way-why-are-we-here/article_4718a7f7-d1db-52b2-ae32-a5228c54698f.html
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — After living in the Bay Area for nearly seven years, Hari Raghavan and his wife decided to leave for the East Coast late last year.</p> <p>They were both working remotely and wanted to leave California because of the high cost of living and urban crime. So they made a list of potential relocation cities before choosing Miami for its sunny weather and what they perceived was a better sense of safety.</p> <p>Raghavan said that their Oakland house had been broken into four times and that prior to the pandemic, his wife called him every day during her seven-minute walk home from the BART station because she felt safer with someone on the phone. After moving to Miami, Raghavan said they accidentally left their garage door open one day and were floored when they returned home and found nothing had been stolen.</p> <p>"We moved to the Bay Area because we had to be there if you want to work in tech and start-ups, and now that that's no longer a tether, we took a long hard look and said, 'Wait, why are we here again?' " Raghavan said.</p> <p>He said there wasn't much draw in California's quality of life, local or social policies, or cost of living. "That forced us to question where we actually wanted to live," he said.</p>

An acceleration of people leaving coastal California began during the first year of the pandemic. But new data show it continued even after lockdowns and other COVID restrictions eased.

California ranks second in the country for outbound moves — a phenomenon that has snowballed during the pandemic, according to a [report](#) from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, which tracked data from moving company United Van Lines. Between 2018 and 2019, California had an outbound move rate of 56%. That rate rose to nearly 60% in 2020-21.

Citing changes in work-life balance, opportunities for remote work and [more people deciding to quit their jobs](#), the report found that droves of Californians are leaving for states like Texas, Virginia, Washington and Florida. California lost more than 352,000 residents between April 2020 and January 2022, according to California Department of Finance statistics.

San Francisco and Los Angeles rank first and second in the country, respectively, for outbound moves as the cost of living and housing prices continue to balloon and homeowners flee to less expensive cities, according to a [report from Redfin](#) released this month.

Angelenos, in particular, are flocking to places like Phoenix, Las Vegas, [San Diego](#), San Antonio and Dallas. The number of Los Angeles residents leaving the city jumped from around 33,000 in the second quarter of 2021 to nearly 41,000 in the same span of 2022, according to the report.

California has grappled with [extremely high housing prices](#) compared with other states, according to USC economics professor Matthew Kahn. Combined with the pandemic and the rise in remote work, privileged households relocated when they had the opportunity.

"People want to live here, but an unintended consequence of the state's environmentalism is we're not building enough housing in desirable downtown areas," Kahn said. "That prices out middle-class people to the suburbs [and creates] long commutes. We don't have road pricing to help the traffic congestion, and these headaches add up. So when you create the possibility of work from home, many of these people ... they say 'enough' and they move to a cheaper metropolitan area."

Kahn also pointed out that urban crime, a [growing unhoused population](#), public school quality and overall quality of life are driving out residents.

"In New York City, but also in San Francisco, there are all these fights about which kids get into which elite public schools," he said. "The rich are always able to hide in their bubble, but if the middle class looks at this quality of life declining, that's a push factor to leave."

Redfin chief economist Daryl Fairweather cited a June [report](#) that tracked the change in spending power of a homebuyer on a \$2,500 monthly budget. While 11.2% of homes in Los Angeles were affordable on that budget, using a 3% interest rate, that amount swelled to about 72% in Houston and about 50% in Phoenix.

"It's really an affordability problem," Fairweather said. "California for the longest time has prioritized single-family zoning, which makes it so people stay in their homes longer because their property taxes don't reflect the true value. California is the epicenter of where the housing shortage is so people have no choice but to move elsewhere."

While California experienced a major population boom in the late 20th century — reaching 37 million people by 2000 — it's been losing residents since, with [new growth lagging](#) behind the rest of the country, according to the [Public Policy Institute of California](#). The state's population increased by 5.8% from 2010 to 2020, below the national growth rate of 6.8%, and resulting in the [loss of a congressional seat](#) in 2021 for the first time in the state's history.

Although California has relied on immigration to offset its population decline for the past two decades, that flow has also shrunk, according to UCLA economics professor Lee Ohanian.

Delays in processing migration requests to the U.S. were compounded during the pandemic, resulting in the [lowest levels of immigration](#) in decades, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Estimates showed a [net increase of 244,000 new immigrants](#) between 2020 and 2021 — roughly half the 477,000 new immigrant residents recorded between 2019 and 2020 and a drastic reduction from more than 1 million reported from 2015 to 2016.

The state is also seeing a dwindling middle class, said Ohanian, who cited a [report](#) from the National Assn. of Realtors, outlining that the national median home sales price has reached \$416,000, a record high. Meanwhile, California's median home price has topped \$800,000.

"(California is) at a risk for becoming a state for very, very wealthy people and very, very low earners who receive state and local and federal aid that allows them to be able to live here," Ohanian said. "We should worry about those in the middle who are earning that \$78,000 household median income and is, at the end of the day, really struggling, especially if they have interest in buying a home."

Los Angeles County, in particular, has suffered from slowed population growth, as have rural parts of the state, while Orange County, Sacramento and some parts of the Bay Area have managed to see some gains, the Public Policy Institute of California found.

Fairweather said that since she last lived in Los Angeles in 2016, she's noticed fewer [affordable places](#) to rent.

"It used to be that Santa Monica and Beverly Hills were expensive, but you could find affordable housing on the Eastside," she said. "But that got expensive and you had to find housing near South Central. Now, there's nowhere within a two-hour commute of downtown Los Angeles that's still affordable."

Bay Area native Kenny Phung, who made the exodus from California last fall when his partner got into nursing school in Portland, Oregon, said high rent prices helped cement the decision to move out of state. Phung was living with three roommates in Los Angeles for \$3,600 total per month but found a two-bedroom apartment for less than half that price in Portland. He's currently working as a project manager at a San Jose-based company that allows him to work remotely.

"It just didn't make sense," Phung said. "Why would I want to live in California when I'm working from home and paying something outrageous for such a small space when I can try things out and be able to save money on rent?"

Housing was also a major factor in Raghavan's decision to leave the Golden State, he said, adding that downtown Miami has multiple skyscrapers, more affordable housing, well-paved roads and better infrastructure and services.

"The Bay Area has become a land of minor inconveniences, and some are not-so-minor anymore," he said. "Housing and real estate have ripples across everything. It makes rent more expensive for restaurants, which raises food prices, and it causes people to commute over longer distances. Everything becomes a burden."

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HEADLINE	07/30 Hawaii receives last coal shipment
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/30/us/hawaii-last-coal-shipment-trnd/index.html
GIST	(CNN)On Wednesday, Hawaii received its last shipment of coal before closing its last functioning coal plant. Gov. David Ige called the final shipment "a huge step forward in Hawai'i's transition to clean energy" on Twitter .

	<p>"In its time, coal was an important resource for Hawai'i and I'd like to thank the workers who have run our last remaining coal plant."</p> <p>"Renewable energy projects to replace coal are coming online with more on the way," wrote Ige. "Even as we face challenges in making this transition, it's the right move for our communities and planet. Most importantly, it will leave Hawai'i a better place for our children and grandchildren."</p> <p>The shipment came from Indonesia, according to CNN affiliate KHNL. The power plant was built by AES Corporation in the 1980s and supplies electricity to tens of thousands of homes on Oahu, KHNL reported.</p> <p>Although it is not clear what will become of the power plant itself, AES has said it will offer jobs at its solar, wind, and battery storage projects to the 40 remaining coal plant employees.</p> <p>In 2015, Gov. Ige signed a bill setting a goal for Hawaii state utilities to generate 100 percent of their electricity sales from renewable energy resources by 2045, according to a news release from his office.</p> <p>The state has been a leader in pursuing renewable energy sources like solar energy: The capital city of Honolulu has the highest solar capacity per person, according to a report from April.</p> <p>And in 2020, the state signed Senate Bill 2629 into law, which bans utilities from adding new coal-powered plants or extending existing agreements with facilities burning coal after 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Russia plunders Sudan gold for Putin
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/29/africa/sudan-russia-gold-investigation-cmd-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Khartoum, Sudan (CNN)Days after Moscow launched its bloody war on Ukraine, a Russian cargo plane stood on a Khartoum runway, a strip of tarmac surrounded by red-orange sand. The aircraft's manifest stated it was loaded with cookies. Sudan rarely, if ever, exports cookies.</p> <p>A heated debate transpired between officials in a back office of Khartoum International Airport. They feared that inspecting the plane would vex the country's increasingly pro-Russian military leadership. Multiple previous attempts to intercept suspicious Russian carriers had been stopped. Ultimately, however, the officials decided to board the plane.</p> <p>Inside the hold, colorful boxes of cookies stretched out before them. Hidden just beneath were wooden crates of Sudan's most precious resource. Gold. Roughly one ton of it.</p> <p>This incident in February -- recounted by multiple official Sudanese sources to CNN -- is one of at least 16 known Russian gold smuggling flights out of Sudan, Africa's third largest producer of the precious metal, over the last year and a half.</p> <p>Multiple interviews with high-level Sudanese and US officials and troves of documents reviewed by CNN paint a picture of an elaborate Russian scheme to plunder Sudan's riches in a bid to fortify Russia against increasingly robust Western sanctions and to buttress Moscow's war effort in Ukraine.</p> <p>The evidence also suggests that Russia has colluded with Sudan's beleaguered military leadership, enabling billions of dollars in gold to bypass the Sudanese state and to deprive the poverty-stricken country of hundreds of millions in state revenue.</p> <p>In exchange, Russia has lent powerful political and military backing to Sudan's increasingly unpopular military leadership as it violently quashes the country's pro-democracy movement.</p>

Former and current US officials told CNN that Russia actively supported Sudan's 2021 military coup which overthrew a transitional civilian government, dealing a devastating blow to the Sudanese pro-democracy movement that had toppled President Omar al-Bashir two years earlier.

"We've long known Russia is exploiting Sudan's natural resources," one former US official familiar with the matter told CNN. "In order to maintain access to those resources Russia encouraged the military coup."

"As the rest of the world closed in on [Russia], they have a lot to gain from this relationship with Sudan's generals and from helping the generals remain in power," the former official added. "That 'help' runs the gamut from training and intelligence support to jointly benefiting from Sudan's stolen gold."

At the heart of this quid pro quo between Moscow and Sudan's military junta is Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch and key ally of President Vladimir Putin.

The heavily sanctioned 61-year-old controls a shadowy network of companies that includes Wagner, a paramilitary group linked to alleged torture, mass killings and looting in several war-torn countries including Syria and the Central African Republic (CAR). Prigozhin denies links to Wagner.

In Sudan, Prigozhin's main vehicle is a US-sanctioned company called Meroe Gold -- a subsidiary of Prigozhin owned M-invest -- which extracts gold while providing weapons and training to the country's army and paramilitaries, according to invoices seen by CNN.

"Through Meroe Gold, or other companies associated with Prigozhin employees, he has developed a strategy to loot the economic resources of the African countries where he intervenes, as a counterpart to his support to the governments in place," said Denis Korotkov, investigator at the London-based Dossier Center, which tracks the criminal activity of various people associated with the Kremlin. The center was started by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia, now living in exile in London.

CNN, in collaboration with the Dossier Center, can also reveal that at least one high-level Wagner operative -- Alexander Sergeyevich Kuznetsov -- has overseen operations in Sudan's key gold mining, processing and transit sites in recent years.

Kuznetsov -- also known by his call signs "Ratibor" and "Radimir" -- is a convicted kidnapper who fought in neighboring Libya and commanded Wagner's first attack and reconnaissance company in 2014. He is a four-time recipient of Russia's Order of Courage award and was pictured alongside Putin and Dmitri Utkin -- Wagner's founder -- in 2017. The European Union sanctioned Kuznetsov in 2021.

The growing bond between Sudan's military rulers and Moscow has spawned an intricate gold smuggling network. According to Sudanese official sources as well as flight data reviewed by CNN in collaboration with flight tracker Twitter account Gerjon, at least 16 of the flights intercepted by Sudanese officials last year were operated by military plane that came to and from the Syrian port city of Latakia where Russia has a major airbase.

Gold shipments also follow a land route to the CAR, where [Wagner has propped up a repressive regime](#) and is reported to have meted out some of its cruelest tactics on the country's population, according to multiple Sudanese official sources and the Dossier Center.

CNN has reached out to the Russian foreign ministry, the Russian defense ministry and the parent organization for the group of companies run by Prigozhin for comment. None has responded.

Responding to the findings of CNN's investigation, a US State Department spokesperson said: "We are monitoring this issue closely, including the reported activities of Meroe Gold, the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, and other sanctioned actors in Sudan, the region, and throughout the gold trade."

"We support the Sudanese people in their pursuit of a democratic and prosperous Sudan that respects human rights," the spokesperson added. "We will continue to make clear our concerns to Sudanese military officials about the malign impact of Wagner, Meroe Gold, and other actors."

Receding into the shadows

Russia's meddling in Sudan's gold began in earnest in 2014 after its invasion of Crimea prompted a slew of Western sanctions. Gold shipments proved an effective way of accumulating and transferring wealth, bolstering Russia's state coffers while sidestepping international financial monitoring systems.

"The downside of gold is that it's physical and a lot more cumbersome to use than international wire transfers but the flip side is that it's much harder if not impossible to freeze or seize," said Daniel McDowell, sanctions specialist and associate professor of Political Science at Syracuse University.

The hub of Russia's gold extraction operation lies deep in the desert of northeast Sudan, a bleached landscape peppered with gaping chasms where miners toil in searing heat, with only tents fashioned from scraps of tarpaulin and sandbags providing any respite.

Miners from those remote artisanal mines converge on al-Ibaidiya -- known as 'gold town' -- every morning, lugging sacks of gold in carts hauled by donkeys along the town's unpaved roads. The highest bidders for their goods, many of them say, are almost invariably merchants dispatched from a nearby processing plant known by locals as 'the Russian company.'

It's a helter-skelter selling process that sources tell CNN is the nerve center of Russia's gold siphoning. Some 85% of the gold in Sudan is sold this way, according to official statistics seen by CNN. The transactions are mostly off-the-books, and Russia dominates this market, according to multiple sources, including mining whistleblowers and security sources.

For at least a decade, Russia has hidden its Sudanese gold dealings from the official record. Sudan's official Foreign Trade Statistics since 2011 consistently list Russia's total gold exports from the country at zero, despite copious evidence of Moscow's extensive dealings in this sector.

Because Russia has benefited from considerable government blind spots, it is difficult to ascertain the exact amount of gold it has removed from Sudan. But at least seven sources familiar with events accuse Russia of driving the lion's share of Sudan's gold smuggling operations -- which is where most of Sudan's gold has ended up in recent years, according to official statistics.

A whistleblower from inside the Sudanese Central Bank showed CNN a photo of a spreadsheet showing that 32.7 tons was unaccounted for in 2021. Using current prices, this amounts to \$1.9 billion worth of missing gold, at \$60 million a ton.

But multiple former and current officials say that the amount of missing gold is even larger, arguing that the Sudanese government vastly underestimates the gold produced at informal artisanal mines, distorting the real number.

Most of CNN's insider sources claim that around 90% of Sudan's gold production is being smuggled out. If true, that would amount to roughly \$13.4 billion worth of gold that has circumvented customs and regulations, with potentially hundreds of millions of dollars lost in government revenue. CNN cannot independently verify those figures.

An anti-corruption Sudanese investigator who has tracked Russia's gold dealings in Sudan for years provided CNN with the coordinates of a key Russian processing plant. When CNN arrived at the site, some five miles from al-Ibaidiya, a Soviet flag fluttered above the compound. A Russian fuel truck was parked outside.

A casual encounter with the guard -- who confirmed that the facility belonged to the so-called "Russian company" -- quickly turned into a tense confrontation.

The guard spoke through a walkie talkie, conveying CNN's request to speak to "the Russian manager." A group of Sudanese men then rushed to the scene and ordered the CNN crew to leave, before the CNN car was tailed by the security detail.

"You need to go," another Sudanese employee at the plant told CNN. "This isn't a Russian company. It is a Sudanese company called al-Solag."

Al-Solag is a Sudanese front company for Meroe Gold, the US-sanctioned Russian mining business, according to five official Sudanese sources and [company registration documents](#) reviewed by CNN.

Al-Solag's formation over the last year has marked a key turning point for Russia's presence in Sudan. Under the new model, Russia's dealings have receded into the shadows, making the arrangements more reliant on Sudan's military leadership and further enabling Russian actors to circumvent state institutions, including regulations pertaining to foreign companies, under the guise of a local business.

CNN has reached out to Sudan's military leadership for comment, and received no reply.

'Too much US scrutiny'

In 2021, Russia's Sudan envoy, Vladimir Zheltov, called for an impromptu meeting with Sudanese mining officials.

Appearing visibly nervous, Zheltov demanded that Meroe Gold be "obscured" after becoming subject to "too much US scrutiny," according to a whistleblower from Sudan's Ministry of Mining who had first-hand knowledge of the meeting.

By June of this year, Zheltov's demands had materialized. The transfer of Meroe Gold's assets to the Sudanese-owned al-Solag appeared to have been completed. An analysis of the registration documents of the two companies revealed striking similarities, including two identical lists of legal penalties.

Under Sudanese law, a company wishing to transfer their holdings must also transfer judgments against it. It is illegal to have an undeclared foreign partner.

Sudan's anti-corruption committee, a watchdog set up to assist Sudan's transition to democracy, then blocked the attempted subterfuge, according to a former civilian official with direct knowledge of the events. The anti-corruption committee sent a detailed report to the armed forces in September 2021 with evidence of the Meroe Gold transfer to al-Solag, urging them to stop what they dubbed a "crime against the state."

The watchdog also accused the military of complicity in Russia's dealings, drawing the ire of the military leadership who lambasted the committee for "harming the armed forces," according to the former civilian official.

"The Russians and Sudanese officers saw the civilians in the government as an obstacle to their plans," the former official added.

In October 2021, a month after the anti-corruption committee stopped the transfer of holdings from Meroe Gold to al-Solag, Sudan's military staged a coup -- which US official and former official sources accuse Russia of backing -- and the junta immediately dismantled the committee.

"Russia is a parasite," the former official told CNN. "It pillaged Sudan. And it has exacted a very large political penalty by terminating a democratic project that could have turned Sudan into a great nation."

Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary unit, is a key beneficiary from Russian support, as the primary recipient of Moscow's weapons and training. Abdel

Fattah al-Burhan -- the country's military ruler -- is also believed by CNN's Sudanese sources to be backed by Russia.

Human rights groups have implicated both Burhan and Dagalo (known as Hemedti) in alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity during Sudan's Darfur conflict that started in 2003.

On the same day that Russia launched its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Hemedti was heading a Sudanese delegation in Moscow to "advance relations" between the two countries.

Wagner boots on the ground

On a dusty border-crossing between the CAR and Sudan in March 2019, a bespectacled 34-year-old Russian frantically sent his boss -- Meroe Gold owner Mikhail Potepkin -- a plea for help.

"Radimir is pissed that no one was warned," wrote Aleksei Pankov in a Telegram conversation which the Dossier Center shared with CNN. He was referring to Kuznetsov, the menacing high-level Wagner operative, depicted as manning the border alongside Sudanese intelligence operatives.

"Tell Radimir that it was a 'closed' operation. That's why we didn't warn him about it," came Potepkin's reply.

"F**k, Radimir is scary. I almost s**t my pants," Pankov wrote back.

This exchange is part of a string of evidence collected by CNN that establishes Kuznetsov as a key Wagner enforcer across key locations in Sudan.

CNN has also seen official Sudanese communiques referencing Kuznetsov as a "problematic" armed Russian who was overseeing security at the Russian gold processing plant near al-Ibaidiya. A source familiar with Meroe Gold's activities in Sudan told CNN that Kuznetsov also frequented the company's offices in Khartoum.

Wagner operatives deploy to Sudan on a rotational basis, the Dossier Center told CNN, and Kuznetsov may be one of several Wagner men in the country. These are strategically dispatched to protect Russia's smuggling scheme that has grown in importance since Russia launched its war on Ukraine.

Those Wagner operatives appear to be part of a growing climate of fear as Moscow tightens its grip on Sudan's gold pipeline, sources say.

Several local journalism networks whose work CNN has drawn on for this report -- such as Mujo Press, al-Bahshoum and activist journalist Hisham Ali's Facebook page -- have been targeted in recent months, driven into exile under the threat of assassination. Ten protesters were gunned down in demonstrations in June alone, three of whom were prominent pro-democracy activists. CNN security sources believe they were deliberately targeted.

High-level Sudanese officials repeatedly urged CNN's Nima Elbagir to steer clear of protest sites. Since CNN began this investigation, Elbagir has been put on the military junta's hit list, according to multiple Sudanese security sources.

As images of Russian tanks encircling Kyiv were flashing on TV screens at Khartoum International Airport, employees watched as the plane laden with cookies and gold took off last February. Senior army brass had intervened and a sense of foreboding set in.

Some of the officials who uncovered the haul were reassigned, some to regional duty stations, and others were sent to army reserves, according to a source with direct knowledge of the incident.

"They paid for doing their jobs," the source told CNN.

HEADLINE	07/31 Guatemala crackdown on political dissent
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/31/guatemala-zamora-arrest-corruption-crackdown/
GIST	<p>An award-winning journalist in Guatemala has gone on a hunger strike to protest his arrest by authorities amid growing signs of a crackdown on political dissent in the country.</p> <p>José Rubén Zamora was arrested at his home in Guatemala City on Friday night as part of an investigation into alleged money laundering, blackmail and influence peddling, according to prosecutors. Zamora denounced the charges against him as a conspiracy, describing his arrest as “political persecution.”</p> <p>Zamora is president and founder of the newspaper elPeriódico, which has reported on suspected corruption within the administration of President Alejandro Giammattei, including in the prosecutor’s office.</p> <p>In a video posted on Twitter on Saturday, Zamora said he would begin a hunger strike protesting his detention. Authorities also raided his newspaper’s headquarters.</p> <p>In a separate post, elPeriódico said it would not be silenced despite what it said were “constant” attacks, persecutions and threats against the paper and its president. “We have always believed in freedom of expression and worked to control power through journalism, against all odds,” the paper wrote.</p> <p>Zamora’s arrest was condemned by human rights groups and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, which gave Zamora its International Press Freedom Award in 1995 for his work advocating for press freedoms and fighting censorship in Guatemala.</p> <p>“Guatemalan authorities should immediately release and drop any criminal charges against journalist José Rubén Zamora, president of elPeriódico,” said CPJ Advocacy Director Gypsy Guillén Kaiser in a statement late Saturday. “Judicial persecution against journalists is a mechanism of intimidation, and authorities in Guatemala need to put an end to their campaign to intimidate and threaten the press.”</p> <p>In a video statement, Rafael Curruchiche, who leads the anti-impunity office in Guatemala, said Zamora’s arrest “has no relation in his capacity as a journalist.” He said that he was being investigated in relation to “a possible act of money laundering in his capacity as a businessman.”</p> <p>Curruchiche was placed on a State Department list of “corrupt and undemocratic actors” from Central America earlier this month. The U.S. report accuses Curruchiche of obstructing investigations into acts of corruption “by disrupting high-profile corruption cases against government officials.”</p> <p>Several other senior Guatemalan officials, including Attorney General María Consuelo Porras, were placed on the list last year. In May, the State Department announced additional sanctions against her over allegations of “involvement in significant corruption.”</p> <p>In March, one of Guatemala’s most important judges and a key U.S. ally in the fight against corruption resigned and fled the country in a worrying sign of the deterioration of its judicial system.</p> <p>The Biden administration has said bolstering anti-corruption programs and improving governance in Central America are essential to deterring illegal migration, and has accused senior officials and politicians in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras of corruption.</p> <p>Guatemala isn’t the only Central American government cracking down on journalists. In Honduras, journalist Sonia Pérez is facing criminal charges over her coverage of police evictions of Indigenous people, according to CPJ. In El Salvador, authorities have effectively criminalized reporting on gangs, leading to concerns about human rights amid a wave of arrests often made with very little evidence.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 In recession? Might not know for months
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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/if-this-is-a-recession-we-might-not-know-for-months-11659173402?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>As the Federal Reserve continues to raise interest rates in its fight against the highest inflation in more than four decades, economic indicators flash signs of a slowdown and questions abound over what is a recession and whether the U.S. has entered one.</p> <p>U.S. gross domestic product fell by an inflation and seasonally adjusted annual rate of 0.9% in the second quarter, the Commerce Department said Thursday. It was the economy's second-consecutive quarterly contraction, which is one definition of recession, though not the one used by the official arbiter, the National Bureau of Economic Research.</p> <p>The nonprofit academic group's Business Cycle Dating Committee tracks an array of measures in addition to GDP to identify the timing of peaks and troughs within cycles of economic activity. These peaks and troughs represent transitions between economic expansions and contractions.</p> <p>We often don't know when a recession begins or ends until months later, when the committee makes the call.</p> <p>The group takes a deliberate, retrospective approach in making these announcements to avoid the need for revisions. Since the committee was created in 1978, there have been six recessions. The starts to the downturns have been announced from four months to a year after they happened.</p> <p>The end of recessions in some cases have taken longer to call. As with peaks, the committee tends to wait a number of months to identify a trough after it has occurred.</p> <p>There have been 34 recessions since 1857, ranging in length from more than five years to the pandemic-driven contraction of 2020 that lasted two months.</p> <p>Recessions have become more infrequent in recent decades. There have been just three since the start of the century.</p> <p>The NBER's definition of a recession isn't cut-and-dried and leaves room for interpretation. The group loosely defines it as a "significant decline in economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months," a phrase that can be shortened to three single-word criteria: "depth, diffusion and duration."</p> <p>The 2020 recession was the shortest on record and didn't quite check the third box of "more than a few months," with a peak occurring in February 2020 and a trough just two months later.</p> <p>NBER ultimately concluded that the severity of conditions related to the first two criteria—the "depth" and "diffusion"—offset the relative lack of duration. The decline in economic activity early in the pandemic had been "so great and so widely diffused throughout the economy that, even if it proved to be quite brief, the downturn should be classified as a recession."</p> <p>NBER assesses a range of indicators in making calls about the beginning and end of business cycles. They include employment, personal income, consumer spending, manufacturing and industrial production, as well as GDP.</p> <p>Over the past year, growth has slowed in personal income and also manufacturing, a trend roughly similar to those in the 12-month periods preceding the past three recessions.</p> <p>Growth remains relatively strong in other areas, such as industrial production, which is above levels in the run-ups to the past three recessions. The number of people employed also has grown faster than it did in those periods, though it remains below prepandemic levels.</p>

	<p>On Wednesday, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters that he doesn't believe the U.S. is in a recession. He pointed to strength in the labor market, saying, "2.7 million people hired in the first half of the year, it doesn't make sense that the economy would be in recession."</p> <p>Mr. Powell made the remarks a day before the release of the GDP report, but said that subsequent readings can diverge from initial estimates. "Generally the GDP numbers do have a tendency to be revised pretty significantly," he said. "You tend to take first GDP reports with a grain of salt."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Consumers power thru pandemic until now
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/consumers-have-powered-through-the-pandemic-and-inflationuntil-now-11659265202?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>The consumer who fueled the U.S. economy through the pandemic is starting to crack.</p> <p>The past week revealed new evidence from companies and the government that household spending is increasingly strained. Families are paring back purchases of items such as electronics and furniture as prices for essentials like food and gasoline have become more expensive. Inflation drove consumer spending in June to a new four-decade high while personal incomes fell when adjusting for inflation and taxes.</p> <p>Two of the country's biggest retailers, Walmart Inc. and Best Buy Co., warned last week that a steeper-than-expected pullback in shoppers' spending would crimp their profits. The latest financial results also show that many big companies' profits have held up so far this year by passing along to consumers higher labor and fuel costs.</p> <p>Changes in spending habits, so far, have been uneven, companies and economists say. Many people are dining out and traveling more after missing chances to do it earlier in the pandemic. Pent-up demand is also fueling sales for automobiles. And some people—especially higher income households—are continuing to shell out for desired items regardless of elevated prices.</p> <p>Consumer confidence, however, has softened. After raising interest rates for the fourth time this year to battle inflation, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday that people are going to the grocery store and finding that their budget no longer covers their usual shopping list. On Thursday, the government said that the nation's gross domestic product contracted for a second consecutive quarter, raising fears that inflation and a slowdown in inventory building and the housing market are dragging the economy into a recession.</p> <p>"Consumers' budgets are stretched," said Sean Connolly, chief executive of Conagra Brands Inc., which makes Slim Jim meat snacks and Healthy Choice meals. "It forces consumers to be very discerning about what they buy and to find the best overall value."</p> <p>Unilever PLC, Procter & Gamble Co. and Kraft Heinz Co. are bracing for consumers to either cut back or shift to lower-priced or value-oriented products amid economic uncertainty. They each reported lower volumes in their latest quarters, meaning people purchased fewer brand items amid higher prices. Church & Dwight Co., maker of Arm & Hammer branded products, is seeing heightened demand for low-cost laundry detergent, cat litter and other products, said CEO Matthew Farrell.</p> <p>Store-branded goods from oatmeal to paper towels gained market share in the four-week period ended July 10 from a year ago, according to market-research firm IRI. Typically private-label products cost less than brand-name versions.</p> <p>Many consumers who weathered the pandemic with the help of government stimulus and fewer expenses of their own are running out of steam. Some of them now face the return of commuting costs, a need for new work clothes and steeper child-care expenses.</p>

John Rawlings, 22 years old, and Gabby Smith, 21, recently moved into a new home in Florence, Ky., to be closer to Mr. Rawlings's job at a food manufacturer, in part because his hourlong drive to work [became too costly](#). The couple, with 1- and 2-year-old daughters, said they are going without a couch for now in the new place as they work to keep expenses down.

"Sometimes you have to cut back," Mr. Rawlings said, pushing a cart packed with store-brand groceries through a Walmart. "I just had to ask my dad for help with diapers."

The couple estimates they spend about \$300 a week on groceries, double from a year ago. Ms. Smith said higher grocery costs were a shock at first, but the couple has begun to adjust. Mr. Rawlings, for instance, dropped his initial resistance to buying cheaper, private-label alternatives to name-brand products. The children no longer get toys or new clothes during grocery trips.

"We're lucky that we're doing OK and not struggling just to make ends meet," Ms. Smith said.

"Not yet," Mr. Rawlings added.

In McKinney, Texas, Walter Jimenez is working three part-time jobs on top of his full-time career as a teacher. He is a single father with a 14-year-old son who plays hockey and a 16-year-old daughter who loves art. "My son's hockey stick broke, that's \$300. My daughter is constantly using up art pads. It adds up," he said.

Mr. Jimenez is searching for a new apartment because he got notified last week that the rent on his two-bedroom apartment is increasing to \$1,850 a month from \$1,300 a month. "It's really hard to find anything. I'm having to humbly ask if buildings offer teacher discounts," he said.

While people are spending more of their paychecks on groceries, rent and gas, U.S. consumers have pulled back on buying electronics, apparel, housewares and small appliances since March, according to market research firm NPD.

At Abt Electronics Inc., an 86-year-old Glenview, Ill.-based electronics and appliance retailer, sales have softened compared with earlier in the pandemic when shoppers [flocked to buy computers](#), televisions and other stay-at-home favorites, said Jon Abt, co-president of the company. "We are definitely seeing a slowdown in categories like that because you don't need a new computer every year," said Mr. Abt.

But Mr. Abt said consumers across income levels are still spending on items they need whether it is furniture or appliances. Tumi suitcases, a high-price luggage option in the store, are also selling well after dropping off earlier in the pandemic, he said.

The strains on households appear to be spilling into some services they use. [AT&T Inc.](#) said its customers were taking two days longer on average to pay for their monthly internet and wireless bills. [Comcast Corp.](#) failed to add to its ranks of broadband customers [for the first time](#) in its history. [Netflix Inc.](#) has reported [declines in subscribers](#) in each of the past two quarters.

Several restaurant chains, including [McDonald's Corp.](#) and [Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc.](#), have said that lower-income consumers [are dining out less often](#) or buying cheaper food off their menus. Overall restaurant visits and online orders fell 2% in the second quarter versus a year ago, according to NPD. Consumer restaurant spending, which also reflects higher prices, was up 2%.

A survey of consumer sentiment from the University of Michigan showed little change from June, when it hit historic lows, and consumer expectations for a year from now are at their lowest point since the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2009. Every recession in the survey's 76-year history has been marked by a decline in consumer sentiment, though occasionally a short-lived decline doesn't signal a downturn, said survey director Joanne Hsu.

	<p>“In general, people are not feeling good about the economy, and they’re not expecting things to get a whole lot better in the next year,” Prof. Hsu said. “How they’re feeling about the economy is very much colored by the fact that things have been not normal for what feels like a very long time.”</p> <p>Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody’s Analytics, cautions that consumer and business sentiment are so far gloomier than their actions would suggest. Although some consumers are cutting back spending on goods, it is being accompanied by increased spending on services, Mr. Zandi said. Hiring has remained strong and core business investment, excluding defense and transportation, has remained steady.</p> <p>“There’s all kinds of disconnects in this economy, but there’s a very strong disconnect between how people say they feel and how they’re behaving,” Mr. Zandi said. “This gap between sentiment and behavior is the widest I’ve ever seen.”</p> <p>Kraft Heinz CEO Miguel Patricio said that overall, prices for his company’s food and drinks are about 10% higher than a year ago. To soften the blow, Kraft Heinz is planning to offer more discounts, and it is working on some additions to its lineup that will appeal to cash-strapped consumers, such as its new \$1 Lunchables and lower-priced packages of Kraft Singles cheese with fewer slices.</p> <p>“You may decide not to buy a new pair of jeans or a new coffee machine, but you are going to bring food home,” Mr. Patricio said. “Instead of Rib-eye steaks, people are now doing more meatloaf or chicken parm for dinner.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Pandemic changed US health for the worse
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-changed-americans-health-for-the-worse-11659260165?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>The ripple effects of the Covid-19 pandemic’s influence on nearly every aspect of health in America are becoming clear.</p> <p>Covid-19 has killed more than one million people in the U.S., a toll mounting by some 350 people a day. A range of other chronic diseases and acute threats to health also worsened during the pandemic, data show, as people missed screenings, abandoned routines and experienced loss and isolation.</p> <p>“In addition to just the terrible burden of a million Americans dying, there are other repercussions from the pandemic that we need to address,” said Chrissie Juliano, executive director of Big Cities Health Coalition, an organization of city health officials.</p> <p>Some setbacks could be reversed relatively quickly, health experts said, while it might take years to recognize the full effects of others. Here are some of the public-health challenges that grew in the pandemic’s shadow:</p> <p>Heart disease and stroke</p> <p>Overall deaths and the death rates from heart disease and stroke rose sharply during the pandemic, setting back progress against two of the nation’s leading killers, according to a report published in JAMA Network Open in March. Many people missed visits to doctors or avoided hospitals early in the pandemic. Some later died at home, or reached the hospital too late. Covid-19 infection also increases the risk for stroke and heart attack, studies suggest.</p> <p>People also have been under more stress in the past few years or haven’t been as active as before. Some gained weight or struggled to manage chronic conditions, said Donald Lloyd-Jones, a former president of the American Heart Association.</p> <p>“We can’t immediately snap our fingers to get diabetes or blood pressure under control,” said Dr. Lloyd-Jones, chair of preventive medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.</p>

Drug and alcohol use

Drug-overdose deaths, rising before the pandemic, [jumped to a record](#) of more than 107,000 in 2021, according to preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The potent [synthetic opioid fentanyl](#) is driving the crisis, officials have said.

The age-adjusted rate of overdoses in the U.S. also increased from about 22 deaths per 100,000 people in 2019 to 28 per 100,000 in 2020, the agency said. [Disparities in access to treatment](#) are driving up overdose rates among Black and Native American people, data show, as the pandemic [has exacerbated inequities](#) in healthcare outcomes.

Alcohol consumption and excessive drinking also increased during the early months of the pandemic, surveys have shown. A March report in the Journal of the American Medical Association estimated that [alcohol-related deaths increased](#) about 25% from 2019 to 2020, a more rapid rise than in years before the pandemic.

Mental health

More people globally experienced [symptoms of anxiety and depression](#) in the first year of the pandemic, according to the World Health Organization. In the U.S., clinicians and public-health experts have raised alarms about the state of mental health, [particularly among children and adolescents](#). More than one-third of some 7,000 U.S. high-school students who responded to a recent CDC questionnaire in the first six months of 2021 reported [poor mental health](#) during the pandemic.

In 2020, about 5.6% of adults had a serious mental illness within the past year, or a mental, behavior or emotional disorder that interfered with or limited a major life activity, according to estimates from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. About 21% of U.S. adults had any mental illness, SAMHSA estimated.

Firearms deaths

[The U.S. gun-homicide rate](#) increased nearly 35% from 2019 to 2020 to the highest level since 1994, according to a May CDC report. Agency officials cited economic stress, disruption of services and social isolation during the pandemic as potential factors. The firearm-suicide rate increased slightly as well. In a separate CDC report, researchers found that [the suicide rate overall declined by 3%](#) in 2020 from the year prior.

Superbugs

The U.S. also lost ground on [antimicrobial resistance](#)—bacteria, fungi and viruses evolving to withstand medications, making infections harder to treat. Resistant infections that started in the hospital increased at least 15% in 2020 from 2019 among seven pathogens, the CDC said. Related deaths rose as well. Antibiotics were overused early on in 2020 to attempt to treat Covid-19 patients, said Helen Boucher, interim dean of Tufts University School of Medicine. Prevention efforts also likely slipped at overstretched hospitals and healthcare settings, she said, with resources focused on fighting the pandemic.

Sexually transmitted infections

After dropping early in the pandemic, reported [U.S. cases of gonorrhea and syphilis](#) increased by the end of 2020 and were greater than 2019 levels, according to a CDC report.

Some people likely limited their sexual activity at the onset of the pandemic, according to the agency. But reduced screening efforts and less access to care could have led to longer, untreated sexually transmitted infections and more disease spread, the CDC said.

Cancer

In 2020, screening prevalence for breast cancer and cervical cancer decreased by 6% and 11%, respectively, compared with 2018, according to data from the American Cancer Society published in JAMA Network Open. Colonoscopies for men and women dropped 16% but were offset by increases in stool testing that can be done at home.

[Most of the drop occurred](#) in the first few months of the pandemic. Cancer screening has since rebounded but has yet to fully make up for that initial gap, cancer doctors and researchers said. Researchers are tracking whether the gap in screenings will lead to worse outcomes.

Childhood vaccination rates

Routine vaccination rates for three childhood shots among kindergartners was about 1 percentage point lower during the 2020-2021 school year compared with a year earlier, according to the CDC, to about 94% coverage. Some states saw bigger drops.

That 94% rate for the MMR, or measles, mumps and rubella, is now also [below the target of 95% coverage](#), after being roughly at the target the year before. Health authorities use kindergarten inoculation as a benchmark, since vaccination against a series of diseases is often required for school.

Pandemic disruptions likely caused some children to miss scheduled shots, public-health experts said, and schools had less bandwidth to follow up with families and collect data. Some clinicians said hesitancy toward Covid-19 vaccination might spill over into other vaccines. Thirty percent of kids ages 5 through 11 in the U.S. are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, CDC data show.

Lower vaccination rates can give [highly contagious viruses](#) such as measles an opportunity to spread. Global childhood-vaccination rates during the pandemic [recorded their largest sustained decline](#) in about three decades, according to the WHO, following almost a decade of stalled progress.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Russia bolsters troops in occupied south
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/31/ukrainian-offensive-forces-russia-to-bolster-troops-in-occupied-south
GIST	<p>Russia is moving large numbers of troops to Ukraine's south for battles against the country's forces through the newly occupied territories and Crimea, according to Ukraine's deputy head of military intelligence.</p> <p>If Russia won, it would try to capture more territory, said Vadym Skibitsky. "They are increasing their troop numbers, preparing for our counteroffensive [in Ukraine's south] and perhaps preparing to launch an offensive of their own. The south is key for them, above all because of Crimea," he said.</p> <p>Russian troop movements come in response to Ukraine's declared counteroffensive to liberate the southern occupied regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces have retaken dozens of villages and towns along the border, according to the region's military governor, Dmytro Butrii, and are pushing towards Kherson's regional capital.</p> <p>The Kherson region stretches across Ukraine's Dnieper river. Earlier this month, Ukraine carried out precision strikes using US-supplied weapons on the Antonovskiy bridge in the Kherson region, damaging a key Russian supply line. Washington's Institute for the Study of War said Ukrainian forces and partisans also damaged the only two other bridges connecting occupied Kherson.</p> <p>On Saturday, Ukraine's military said it had killed scores of Russian soldiers and destroyed two ammunition dumps while fighting in Kherson.</p> <p>Telling residents to stay away from Russian ammunition dumps, the first deputy head of the Kherson regional council, Yuri Sobolevsky, said that the "Ukrainian army is pouring it on against the Russians, and this is only the beginning".</p> <p>According to Skibitsky, Russia withdrew tactical groups of airborne forces from Donbas two weeks ago and moved them to occupied Kherson. Russia is also moving troops from its eastern military district,</p>

which was being used to attack Sloviansk, a town in Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk, and were in reserve in Russia's southern Belgorod region.

The open-source investigative group, Conflict Intelligence Team, confirmed Skibitsky's claim in part last week.

Meanwhile, in occupied eastern Ukraine, a prison holding Ukrainian prisoners of war was hit on Thursday night. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has denounced the strike as a "war crime", accusing Russia of carrying out the attack to cover up its mistreatment of prisoners. Russia denied responsibility and said Ukrainian forces had struck the prison with rockets. Zelenskiy said at least 50 people died. Ukraine's authorities say they do not yet know the identities of the dead.

Despite moving its tactical battalion groups to the south from the Donbas, Russia would continue to attack in the region, albeit with less intensity, said Skibitsky.

In the Kharkiv area, he said, Russia was focused on defending positions and stopping Ukrainian forces from reaching the Ukraine-Russia border.

If Russia won the battles in southern and eastern Ukraine, it would pursue new offensives to capture more Ukrainian territory using units it was currently forming in Russia, said Skibitsky. "They are currently creating rifle battalions of reservists in each Russian military district and a third army corps in [Russia's] western military district," he said.

Training and equipping of the new corps had begun under the direct supervision of Russia's minister and deputy minister of defence.

Where Russia used the new corps would depend on how the battle developed in Ukraine's southern and eastern regions, Skibitsky said.

He warned that one of the Russian army's "positives" lay in its ability to move troops and equipment quickly. He said Russia practised this during military exercises leading up to the war and pointed to how the Russian forces retreated from Ukraine's northern regions in March and reappeared in the Donbas two weeks later. "We know they can return to Belarus in two to three weeks if they need to," he said.

Skibitsky said that aside from more weapons, Ukraine needed help training troops abroad. He said that Russia had been actively targeting Ukrainian training bases, giving several examples, including a strike on a military base just north-east of Kyiv that killed 87 Ukrainian soldiers in May.

Last Thursday Russian forces hit a military base north-west of Kyiv, according to Ukraine's armed forces. It was not clear if there were casualties. Ukraine has not disclosed military losses for strategic purposes since the war started.

The head of MI6, Richard Moore, tweeted on Saturday that Russia was running out of steam after losing dozens of men and that it had been forced to use Soviet-era weapons.

Skibitsky said Russia was running out of high-quality rockets, but he stressed that they had "a huge amount" of old, Soviet rockets left in its stockpiles. In the last two months, Russia has been using Soviet anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles on land targets.

"They are using rockets which are, let's say, past their sell-by date – over 30 years old – so are less effective," he said. "But they have enough of them and any rocket works to scare the population."

Russia was ramping up production of new weapons, he added. In early July, Russia's parliament passed war economy measures to compel businesses to supply the military with goods and oblige certain employees to work overtime.

	<p>Though western sanctions on hi-tech components that could be used for military purposes have made things slower and more difficult, Russia appears to have found ways to evade them. The US authorities have blacklisted dozens of companies for helping the Russian military dodge sanctions since the invasion.</p> <p>“We are going into winter,” said Skibitsky, who said that Ukraine would need weapons as well as food and financing from the west to get through it.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Ukrainian ships loaded with grain spent another day in port. The vessels are ready to begin exporting goods but the country is waiting for the go-ahead from the UN and Turkey, which brokered a deal with Russia to allow Ukrainian ships safe passage.</p> <p>Shipments from the ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi will be overseen by an Istanbul-based joint coordination centre, which will involve Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and UN officials.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Day 158 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/31/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-15-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian officials have denounced a call by Russia’s embassy in Britain for fighters from the Azov regiment to face a “humiliating” execution, Agence France-Presse has reported. Twitter said the embassy had violated its rules on “hateful conduct” but put a warning on the tweet rather than ban the post about the Azov, a Ukrainian battalion that retains some far-right affiliations. Andriy Yermak, the head of the office of the Ukrainian presidency, responded on Telegram on Saturday: “Russia is a terrorist state. In the 21st century, only savages and terrorists can talk at the diplomatic level about the fact that people deserve to be executed by hanging. Russia is a state sponsor of terrorism. What more evidence is needed?” • Renewed Russian strikes on Ukraine’s frontline have left one person dead in the south of the country and also hit a school in Kharkiv, officials said. The mayor of the southern city of Mykolaiv said one person was killed when rockets pounded two residential districts overnight, AFP reported. In Ukraine’s second city of Kharkiv, rockets from an S-300 surface-to-air system destroyed part of an educational facility, local authorities said. • Russia announced it was banning 32 New Zealand officials and journalists from entering its territory, in response to similar measures taken by Wellington against Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine, AFP reported. Among those subjected to sanctions are the mayor of Wellington, Andrew Foster; the mayor of Auckland, Philip Goff; the commander of New Zealand’s navy, Commodore Garin Golding; and the journalists Kate Green and Josie Pagani, Russia’s foreign ministry said in a statement. • The Ukrainian military said it had killed scores of Russian soldiers and destroyed two ammunition dumps in fighting in the Kherson region, the focus of Kyiv’s counter-offensive in the south and a key link in Moscow’s supply lines. Reuters reported the military’s southern command as saying rail traffic to Kherson over the Dnipro River had been cut, potentially further isolating Russian forces west of the river from supplies in occupied Crimea and the east. • Gazprom has suspended gas supplies to Latvia following tensions between Moscow and the west over the conflict in Ukraine and sweeping sanctions against Russia, AFP reports. The company drastically cut gas deliveries to Europe via the Nord Stream pipeline on Wednesday to about 20% of its capacity. European Union states have accused Russia of squeezing supplies in retaliation for western sanctions over Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine. • The United States ambassador to the United Nations said on Friday there should no longer be any doubt that Russia intended to dismantle Ukraine, Reuters reported. Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the UN security council that the US was seeing growing signs of Russia laying the groundwork to attempt to annex all of the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk and the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. • Russia is “running out of steam” in its war on Ukraine, the chief of Britain’s MI6 intelligence agency, Richard Moore, said in a brief comment on Twitter on Saturday. Moore made the remark above an earlier tweet by the Ministry of Defence that said the Kremlin was “growing desperate”.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia and Ukraine have both launched criminal investigations into strikes that have reportedly killed at least 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war who were held at a pre-trial detention centre in the village of Olenivka, after both countries blamed the other side for the attack. The UN is prepared to send a group of experts to Olenivka to investigate the incident, if it gets consent from both parties. • Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has accused Russia of a “petrifying war crime” over the killings and called on world leaders to “recognise Russia as a terrorist state”. • Ukraine has said it is ready for grain exports to leave its ports again but is waiting for the go-ahead from the UN.
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HEADLINE	07/30 New northern Calif. wildfire; evacuations
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/30/california-wildfire-mckinney-fire-klamath-national-forest-evacuations
GIST	<p>Evacuations have been ordered around Klamath national forest in northern California after a major new wildfire broke out amid searing heat, a prolonged drought and lightning across the region.</p> <p>The fire, known as the McKinney fire, has grown to 18,000 acres in less than 12 hours and has zero containment. It has forced officials in Siskiyou county to order the evacuation of nearby communities, a virtual repeat of the Washburn and Oak fires that have recently ignited in California’s western Sierra Nevada.</p> <p>“The McKinney fire has grown significantly as winds from late evening thunderstorms kept the fire active through the night,” National Park Service officials tweeted.</p> <p>“Runs on the north and south sides of the fire occurred. Firefighters were forced to shift from an offensive perimeter control effort to evacuations, point protection and structure defense.”</p> <p>The park service said it had issued a red flag warning for the region. “Fire managers are expecting a very dynamic day on the fire as predicted weather is expected to be problematic for the firefighters,” park officials posted. It warned that “lightning and high fire danger will likely result in new fire starts”.</p> <p>Nick Nauslar, a fire meteorologist with the National Interagency Fire Center, confirmed that the conditions would probably start new blazes. “We think that we’ll see ignitions and potentially a number of significant fires as well.”</p> <p>Officials observed that after an initial bout of thunderstorms on Friday, the McKinney fire had grown explosively overnight, forming a towering pyrocumulonimbus cloud, or a fire-generated thunderstorm.</p> <p>The region has been under a heat dome, or a ridge of high pressure in the upper atmosphere, for several days. That is now forecast to weaken as a trough approaches, bring with it the likelihood of further lightning strikes. But the Klamath national forest has no recent fire history, meaning that there is a large amount of combustible material on the forest floor.</p> <p>“It’s a classic one-two critical fire weather punch with a preceding extended and intense heat wave followed by the breakdown of the ridge,” Brent Wachter, a fire meteorologist with the Northern California Geographic Coordination Center in Redding, California, told the Washington Post.</p> <p>Meanwhile in Montana, the Elmo wildfire doubled in size to more than 6 sq miles (15.5 sq km) near the town of Elmo and Flathead Lake. Roughly 200 miles to the south, Idaho residents remained under evacuation orders as the Moose fire in the Salmon-Challis national forest charred more than 67.5 sq miles in timbered land near the town of Salmon. It was 17% contained.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Era political violence: threats on lawmakers
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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/31/us-political-violence-threats-against-lawmakers
GIST	<p>Members of the US House of Representatives will now receive up to \$10,000 to upgrade security at their homes in the face of rising threats against lawmakers, the House sergeant at arms announced last week, in yet another sign that American politics has entered a dangerous, violent new phase.</p> <p>As support for political violence appears to be on the rise in the US, experts warn that such threats endanger the health of America's democracy. But they say the country still has time to tamp down violent rhetoric if political leaders, particularly those in the Republican party, stand up and condemn this alarming behavior.</p> <p>The announcement over increasing security for people in Congress came days after a man attacked Lee Zeldin, a New York congressman and Republican gubernatorial candidate, with a sharp object during a campaign event.</p> <p>Two weeks before that, a man was arrested outside the home of Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, for allegedly shouting racist obscenities and threatening to kill her. Last month, authorities filed federal charges against a man who they say traveled from California to Maryland with the intent of murdering the supreme court justice Brett Kavanaugh.</p> <p>Public service has clearly become an increasingly dangerous endeavor in America.</p> <p>Recent polls show an increasing number of Americans are comfortable with political violence, although there is a wide range of opinions on the type of violence that is acceptable.</p> <p>According to a mega-survey conducted by researchers at University of California, Davis, and released this month, one in five US adults say political violence is justified at least in some circumstances. A much smaller portion of survey respondents, 3%, believe that political violence is usually or always justified.</p> <p>Liliana Mason, a political science professor at Johns Hopkins University and co-author of <i>Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy</i>, said the phrasing of survey questions on political violence can drastically affect results. But having studied such polling since 2017, Mason said it is clear that support for political violence is indeed on the rise in the US.</p> <p>"I think of it as pretty low numbers of people who actually approve of violence at all," Mason said. "The problem is that, if you go from 7% to 20%, that means that there are certain social spaces where the norms around anti-violence are eroding."</p> <p>The impact of that trend can be seen at every level of American government, from the halls of Capitol Hill to local polling places.</p> <p>The US Capitol police reported 9,625 threats and directions of interest (meaning concerning actions or statements) against members of Congress last year, compared to 3,939 such instances in 2017.</p> <p>The members of the House select committee investigating the January 6 insurrection have frequently been the targets of violent threats, requiring them to get personal security details.</p> <p>One member of the committee, Republican Adam Kinzinger, recently shared a threatening letter sent to his wife last month. The sender vowed to execute Kinzinger, his wife and their newborn son. He is not seeking re-election in 2022.</p> <p>Even those who help administer elections in the US have reported an increase in threats against them.</p> <p>According to a poll conducted by the Brennan Center for Justice this year, one in six election officials have received threats because of their job, and 77% believe threats against them have increased in recent years.</p>

Jennifer McCoy, a political science professor at Georgia State University whose research focuses on polarized democracies, said: “The kinds of threats and intimidation to ... election administration officials and poll workers is very concerning and is also new.”

The apparent increase in threats against public servants has sparked broader concerns about the health of American democracy, particularly in the wake of the January 6 insurrection.

“There is simply no place for political violence in a healthy democracy. The increase in threats and harassment being leveled at people across our government is deeply concerning,” said Jennifer Dresden, policy advocate for the group Protect Democracy.

“To be clear, we’re not yet at a point where political violence has fundamentally undermined our democracy. But when violence is connected to other authoritarian tactics, like disinformation and efforts to corrupt elections, that sets a dangerous path for our democracy that we cannot ignore.”

While threats and harassment against lawmakers and political candidates appear to have increased across many government institutions, they are not evenly distributed.

[One study](#) of online messages sent to 2020 congressional candidates found that women, particularly women of color, were more likely to be the target of abusive content. Of all the candidates reviewed, the progressive congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who is Somali American, received the highest proportion of abusive messages on Twitter. Fellow progressive congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is Puerto Rican American, saw the most abusive comments on Facebook.

Women of color serving in Congress have spoken publicly about the threats they face, which have become a regular part of their lives on Capitol Hill.

Congresswoman Jahana Hayes, who is Black, [told PBS Newshour last year](#): “I remember, at the beginning of the 116th Congress [in 2019], when we were just spotlighting and highlighting the beautiful diversity of this incoming Congress, but then, on every caucus call, we had members who were getting death threats on a daily basis.”

The acts of political violence carried out in the US are also unevenly distributed across the ideological spectrum. According to [a study](#) conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, rightwing extremists have committed about 75% of the 450 political murders that occurred in the US over the past decade. In comparison, Islamic extremists were responsible for about 20% of the murders, while leftwing extremists were blamed for 4% of the killings.

Experts argue the frequency of rightwing violence compared with leftwing violence can be partly explained by Republican leaders’ failure to condemn threatening rhetoric.

“We see justifications for violence that are similar on the left and right,” said Rachel Kleinfeld, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who studies political conflict. “But we see incidents of violence that are vastly higher on the right and that has to do with all of the normalization of violence from leaders on the right.”

That normalization has been on vivid display over the past couple of years in the US. Donald Trump infamously referred to his supporters who carried out the deadly January 6 insurrection as “very special”, telling them: “We love you.” Trump was impeached by the Democratic-controlled House for his role in the 6 January riot, but acquitted in the Senate.

Last year, House Democrats, over [near-unanimous Republican opposition](#), voted to strip the far-right congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene of her committee assignments, after it was discovered that she had previously expressed support for assassinating Barack Obama and the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi.

In November, Congressman Paul Gosar received the same punishment, as well as a House censure, after he shared an animated video depicting violence against Joe Biden and Ocasio-Cortez. Only [two Republicans](#) supported the censure.

Most recently, the Senate candidate Eric Greitens was widely criticized for airing a campaign ad that appeared to encourage violence against more moderate Republicans. In the ad, Greitens, who resigned as Missouri governor over allegations of sexual harassment, is seen carrying a shotgun and bursting into homes as he urges the “hunting” of Rinos, meaning Republicans in Name Only.

Research indicates that the messages supporters receive from their political leaders have a large impact on whether they actually carry out violent acts, several experts said. In experiments conducted by Mason and her colleagues, some participants were asked to read a quote from Biden or Trump condemning violence while others read nothing. Those who had read the quote were significantly less approving of violence.

“Leaders are actually uniquely powerful in being able to tamp down violence,” Mason said. “Republicans in particular are not using that power. And they could, but they’re not.”

Although political leaders are particularly powerful when it comes to reducing violent rhetoric, Mason’s research indicates that average people may have some leverage of their own. Mason’s team saw some positive results when they asked participants to read messages from random Twitter users condemning political violence. For the overwhelming majority of Americans who oppose such violence, the findings could offer some hope.

“For Americans in general, I think it’s sort of empowering to know that every single one of us has the potential to reduce violence by simply rejecting it,” Mason said. “We can all do that. All the 80% of us who don’t think violence is acceptable have a real voice, and it’s important to use it.”

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HEADLINE	07/30 Pakistan military chief seeks US help
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/30/pakistan-military-chief-seeks-us-help-on-release-o/
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan’s powerful army chief has contacted Washington, seeking U.S. help in securing an early release of a crucial \$1.7 billion installment from the International Monetary Fund to his country, struggling with a deepening economic crisis, Pakistani officials said Saturday.</p> <p>According to several government officials, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa discussed the issue with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, appealing on Washington to use its influence with the IMF to help Pakistan.</p> <p>The appeal was a rare reaching out by the army chief. Pakistan’s relations with the United States have been troubled in recent years, mainly over the issue of neighboring Afghanistan, now run by the Taliban.</p> <p>The relations remained especially tense under former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April. However, Pakistan’s military, which has directly ruled the country for more than half of its 75-year history, has closely worked with the U.S. and was an official ally in the war on terror against al-Qaida.</p> <p>Pakistan’s foreign ministry confirmed Friday that Bajwa and Sherman had talked.</p> <p>“I understand (the) conversation has taken place, but at this stage, I am not in direct knowledge of the content of this discussion,” said ministry spokesman Asim Iftikhar.</p> <p>The officials who spoke to The Associated Press on Saturday said the discussion focused on the IMF loan. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.</p>

Pakistan and the IMF originally signed the bailout accord in 2019. But the release of a \$1.7 billion tranche has been on hold since earlier this year, when the IMF expressed concern about Pakistan's compliance with the deal's terms under Khan.

Khan's successor, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and his government reached a preliminary agreement with the IMF earlier this month to revive the bailout package. That agreement was subject to approval from the fund's board of directors.

Pakistan had hoped for a quick revival of the bailout, but the IMF has so far not released the much-needed installment, which may have prompted Bajwa's call to Washington. It remained unclear what U.S. officials could do to speed up the process of the bailout.

There was no immediate comment from Washington on the phone call.

Bajwa also spoke by phone with the head of U.S Central Command in the Mideast, Gen. Michael Kurilla, on Friday, according to a military statement. It quoted Kurilla as saying he appreciates the role Pakistan plays in the region's stability and expressing hopes for further improvement in cooperation with Pakistan.

Pakistan desperately needs the IMF loan. Earlier in July, the fund said it would raise the value of the bailout from \$6 billion to \$7 billion, if approved by its executive board, usually considered a formality.

Sharif has repeatedly blamed the former prime minister's government, alleging that Khan - a former cricket star turned Islamist politician - had deliberately violated IMF's conditions in order to remain popular among followers at home.

Analysts say the revival of the IMF bailout will help Pakistan and encourage other international financial institutions to engage with the South Asian country.

Sharif's government has also been in contact with Washington over reviving the IMF bailout. Since his ouster, Khan has repeatedly alleged that his government was toppled under a U.S. plot, a charge Washington denies.

Since Khan's ouster, Pakistan's currency has plummeted to an all-time low amid uncertainty about IMF assistance. The rupee slid a record low of about 240 against the dollar last weekend. Previously, the dollar sold for 225 rupees.

The steady decline in this Islamic nation's currency has spread panic among its business community. Rising food prices and inflation has made Sharif's government, now in its four month in office, highly unpopular.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Biden tests Covid positive again: rebound
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/us/politics/biden-covid-positive.html
GIST	<p>President Biden tested positive for the coronavirus again on Saturday morning, becoming the latest example of a rebound case after taking the Paxlovid treatment that has otherwise been credited with broadly impressive results in fighting the virus and suppressing its worst effects.</p> <p>“The president has experienced no re-emergence of symptoms, and continues to feel quite well,” Dr. Kevin C. O’Connor, the White House physician, said in a memo released by the press office. “This being the case, there is no reason to reinstitute treatment at this time, but we will obviously continue close observation.”</p> <p>The “‘rebound’ positivity,” as Dr. O’Connor termed it, meant that Mr. Biden was forced to resume “strict isolation procedures” in keeping with medical advice. The White House announced that the president would no longer travel to his home in Wilmington, Del., on Sunday as planned nor make a scheduled visit</p>

to Michigan on Tuesday to promote [newly passed legislation](#) supporting the domestic semiconductor industry.

Mr. Biden played down the development. “Folks, today I tested positive for COVID again,” he [wrote on Twitter](#). “This happens with a small minority of folks. I’ve got no symptoms but I am going to isolate for the safety of everyone around me. I’m still at work, and will be back on the road soon.”

The White House later [posted a video of the president](#) on the Truman Balcony with his dog Commander and he appeared well. “I’m feeling fine,” he said. “Everything’s good.”

Mr. Biden [first tested positive](#) for Covid-19 on July 21 and experienced a sore throat, runny nose, cough, body aches and fatigue. After five days of isolation, he [tested negative](#) on Tuesday evening and returned to the Oval Office on Wednesday, declaring that his relatively mild case demonstrated how much progress had been made in fighting the virus that has killed more than one million Americans.

But doctors were watching for signs of a rebound case and made sure to keep testing him every day. He tested negative on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday before receiving a positive antigen result on Saturday morning.

Paxlovid rebound has become a source of debate within the scientific community and among Covid patients. Initial clinical studies of the drug, which is made by Pfizer, suggested that only about 1 percent to 2 percent of those treated with Paxlovid experienced symptoms again. A study [published in June](#) that has not yet been peer-reviewed found that of 13,644 adults, about 5 percent tested positive again within 30 days and 6 percent experienced symptoms again.

But the anecdotal accounts of Paxlovid rebound — including [a case involving Dr. Anthony S. Fauci](#), the president’s chief medical adviser — have echoed widely, causing many to wonder whether the reported data was still accurate as the new and much more contagious BA.5 subvariant sweeps through communities and reinfects even patients who recently recovered from Covid-19.

“I think this was predictable,” Dr. Jonathan Reiner, a prominent cardiologist and professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University Hospital, [wrote on Twitter on Saturday](#) after the president’s positive test was disclosed. He added that “the prior data suggesting ‘rebound’ Paxlovid positivity in the low single digits is outdated” and that the real number was likely significantly higher.

Either way, experts stressed that Paxlovid had been notably successful in preventing more severe Covid-19 illnesses and hospitalizations. And a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study [published in June](#) reported that symptoms from a rebound tended to be milder than during the primary infection and unlikely to lead to hospitalization.

“While we continue to monitor real-world data, we remain very confident in the treatment’s effectiveness at preventing severe outcomes from Covid-19,” Amy Rose, a Pfizer spokeswoman, said in a statement on Saturday.

The C.D.C. issued an [emergency health advisory](#) in May that said people experiencing a rebound case “should restart isolation and isolate again” for at least five days, reflecting the agency’s general [isolation recommendations](#) for people infected with the virus. The advisory also said that rebounding did not represent reinfection with the virus or resistance to Paxlovid.

Dr. Ashish K. Jha, the White House’s Covid-19 response coordinator, told reporters when Mr. Biden first tested positive that by looking at Twitter, “it feels like everybody has rebound, but it turns out there’s actually clinical data” suggesting otherwise. Moreover, he said, “Paxlovid is working really well at preventing serious illness, rebound or no rebound, and that’s why he was offered it, and that’s why the president took it.”

Dr. Paul G. Auwaerter, the clinical director in the infectious diseases division at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, said it was unlikely that Mr. Biden, who has been fully vaccinated and boosted twice, would become seriously ill. He added that scientists were working to explain why some people experience a rebound of the virus.

Among his Covid-19 patients experiencing a rebound case, Dr. Auwaerter said, many of them have had the recent Omicron subvariants. None has been hospitalized while rebounding. Those highly infectious and vaccine-evasive forms of the virus, he added, can cause people to test positive for longer.

Taking the drug, Dr. Auwaerter said, could be like “moving the goal posts” in the course of an infection, suppressing the virus but not clearing it completely. Still, he said, high-risk people should “absolutely” still take the medication.

Dr. John P. Moore, a virologist at Weill Cornell Medicine, said researchers were still lacking correlations between age, risk factors or vaccination status. “I haven’t heard anyone come up with a definitive cause,” he said. “He’s just the unlucky guy in the one out of 20. It’s just a numbers game.”

Dr. Moore said that if data could support such a move, federal regulators might want to consider allowing a longer course of the drug, to definitively rid the body of the virus. “The simplest thing would be to go back on the drug for longer,” he said.

Mr. Biden’s rebound case will complicate his effort to turn his illness into a positive story. As the [oldest president in the nation’s history](#), Mr. Biden, 79, has been eager to show that he remains fit, especially as he forecasts plans to run for a second term in 2024. He continued to work from the White House residence during his first isolation, appearing by video before several groups, and then made a triumphal return to work in person on Wednesday.

Instead of the narrative of beating the virus, however, the president’s rebound case reinforces the unpleasant reality that the pandemic refuses to go away. Although the death toll has fallen dramatically, Covid-19 remains a fact of life for Americans, some of whom have been infected multiple times.

Mr. Biden’s new positive test may also raise questions about his fidelity to precautions against infecting others after returning to the office. Aides said he would wear a mask while with others, but in every public appearance he made since Wednesday, his face remained uncovered.

Aides said that he was socially distant from others and that he was cautious to avoid exposing aides, Secret Service agents and members of the household staff. The White House Medical Unit found that 17 people had been in close contact with Mr. Biden before his initial positive test, but as of Wednesday none had tested positive.

While the president did not wear a mask in the video on Saturday, [a photograph](#) released by the White House showed him wearing one as he signed a disaster declaration responding to flooding in Kentucky.

Dr. Auwaerter said Mr. Biden might not have put others at great risk in the last few days even without wearing a mask, since he was being tested for the virus regularly and was testing negative. For those not testing as regularly, he said, it would be prudent to continue wearing a tightfitting and high-quality mask, particularly around high-risk people, because of how infectious Omicron subvariants can be.

But the new positive test will also set back Mr. Biden’s efforts to get back on the road to promote his agenda and campaign for Democrats facing an uphill struggle to keep control of both houses of Congress in this fall’s midterm elections.

The president, whose [approval rating stood at only 33 percent](#) in a New York Times/Siena College poll in July, has been described as eager to travel the country after a spate of foreign trips, but the renewed isolation will delay that further.

HEADLINE	07/31 Turning point: Latin America shifts left
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/31/world/americas/latin-america-leftist-leaders.html
GIST	<p>BOGOTÁ, Colombia — In Chile, a tattooed former student activist won the presidency with a pledge to oversee the most profound transformation of Chilean society in decades, widening the social safety net and shifting the tax burden to the wealthy.</p> <p>In Peru, the son of poor farmers was propelled to victory on a vow to prioritize struggling families, feed the hungry and correct longstanding disparities in access to health care and education.</p> <p>In Colombia, a former rebel and longtime legislator was elected the country's first leftist president, promising to champion the rights of Indigenous, Black and poor Colombians, while building an economy that works for everyone.</p> <p>“A new story for Colombia, for Latin America, for the world,” he said in his victory speech, to thunderous applause.</p> <p>After years of tilting rightward, Latin America is hurtling to the left, a watershed moment that began in 2018 with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and could culminate with a victory later this year by a leftist candidate in Brazil, leaving the region’s six largest economies run by leaders elected on leftist platforms.</p> <p>A combination of forces have thrust this new group into power, including an anti-incumbent fervor driven by anger over chronic poverty and inequality, which have only been exacerbated by the pandemic and have deepened frustration among voters who have taken out their indignation on establishment candidates.</p> <p>But just as new leaders settle into office, their campaign pledges have collided with a bleak reality, including a European war that has sent the cost of everyday goods, from fuel to food, soaring, making life more painful for already suffering constituents and evaporating much of the good will presidents once enjoyed.</p> <p>Chile’s Gabriel Boric, Peru’s Pedro Castillo and Colombia’s Gustavo Petro are among the leaders who rode to victory promising to help the poor and disenfranchised, but who find themselves facing enormous challenges in trying to meet the high expectations of voters.</p> <p>Unlike today, the last significant leftist shift in Latin America, in the first decade of the millennium, was propelled by a commodities boom that allowed leaders to expand social programs and move an extraordinary number of people into the middle class, raising expectations for millions of families.</p> <p>Now that middle class is sliding backward, and instead of a boom, governments face pandemic-battered budgets, galloping inflation fed by the war in Ukraine, rising migration and increasingly dire economic and social consequences of climate change.</p> <p>In Argentina, where the leftist Alberto Fernández took the reins from a right-wing president in late 2019, protesters have taken to the streets amid rising prices. Even larger protests erupted recently in Ecuador, threatening the government of one of the region’s few newly elected right-wing presidents, Guillermo Lasso.</p> <p>“I don’t want to be apocalyptic about it,” said Cynthia Arnson, a distinguished fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. “But there are times when you look at this that it feels like the perfect storm, the number of things hitting the region at once.”</p> <p>The rise of social media, with the potential to supercharge discontent and drive major protest movements, including in Chile and Colombia, have shown people the power of the streets.</p>

Beginning in August, when Mr. Petro takes over from his conservative predecessor, [five of the six largest economies](#) in the region will be run by leaders who campaigned from the left.

The sixth, Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, could swing that way in a national election in October. Polls show that former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a fiery leftist, has a wide lead on the right-wing incumbent, President Jair Bolsonaro.

New leaders in Colombia and Chile are far more socially progressive than leftists in the past, calling for a shift away from fossil fuels and advocating for abortion rights at a time when the United States Supreme Court is moving the country in the opposite direction.

But taken together, this group is extremely mixed, differing on everything from economic policy to their commitment to democratic principles.

Mr. Petro and Mr. Boric have vowed to vastly expand social programs for the poor, for example, while Mr. López Obrador, who is [focused on austerity](#), is reducing spending.

What does link these leaders, however, are promises for sweeping change that in many instances are running headlong into difficult and growing challenges.

In Chile late last year, Mr. Boric beat José Antonio Kast, a right-wing establishment politician associated with Chile's former dictator, Augusto Pinochet, by pledging to jettison the neoliberal economic policies of the past.

But just months into his term, with an inexperienced cabinet, divided Congress, rising consumer prices and unrest in the country's south, Mr. Boric's approval ratings [have plummeted](#).

Ninety percent of poll respondents [told the polling firm Cadem](#) this month that they believed the country's economy was stuck or going backward.

Like many neighbors in the region, Chile's yearly inflation rate is the highest it's been in more than a generation, [at 11.5 percent](#), spurring a cost-of-living crisis.

In southern Chile, a land struggle between the Mapuche, the country's largest Indigenous group, and the state has entered its deadliest phase in 20 years, leading Mr. Boric to reverse course on one of his campaign pledges and redeploy troops in the area.

Catalina Becerra, 37, a human resources manager from Antofagasta, in northern Chile, said that "like many people of my generation" she voted for Mr. Boric because Mr. Kast, "didn't represent me in the slightest."

"But I wasn't convinced by what he could do for the country," Ms. Becerra added. "He has not achieved what he said he would."

In September, Chileans will vote on a remarkably progressive constitution that enshrines gender equality, environmental protections and Indigenous rights and is meant to replace a Pinochet-era document.

The president has bound his success to the referendum, putting himself in a precarious position should the draft be rejected, which polls show is for now the more likely outcome.

In neighboring Peru, Mr. Castillo rose last year from virtual anonymity to beat Keiko Fujimori, a right-wing career politician whose father, former President Alberto Fujimori, governed with an iron fist and introduced neoliberal policies similar to those rejected by Chilean voters.

While some Peruvians supported Mr. Castillo solely as a rejection of Ms. Fujimori, he also represented real hopes for many, especially poor and rural voters.

As a candidate, Mr. Castillo promised to empower farmers with more subsidies, access to credit and technical assistance.

But today, he is barely managing to survive politically. He has governed erratically, pulled between his far-left party and the far-right opposition, reflecting the fractious politics that helped him win the presidency.

Mr. Castillo — whose approval rating has sunk to 19 percent, according to the Institute of Peruvian Studies — is now subject to five criminal probes, has already faced two impeachment attempts and cycled through seven interior ministers.

The agrarian reform he pledged has yet to translate into any concrete policies. Instead, price spikes for food, fuel and fertilizer are hitting his base the hardest.

Farmers are struggling through one of the worst crises in decades, facing the biggest planting season of the year without widespread access to synthetic fertilizer, most of which they normally get from Russia, but is difficult to obtain because of global supply disruptions related to the war.

Eduardo Zegarra, an investigator at GRADE, a research institute, called the situation “unprecedented.”

“I think this is going to unfold very dramatically, and usher in a lot of instability,” he said.

In a poor, hillside neighborhood in Lima, the capital, many parents are skipping meals so their children have more to eat.

“We voted for Castillo because we had the hope that his government would be different,” said Ruth Canchari, 29, a stay-at-home mother of three children. “But he’s not taking action.”

In Colombia, Mr. Petro will take office facing many of the same headwinds.

Poverty has risen — 40 percent of households now live on less than \$100 a month, less than half of the monthly minimum wage — while inflation has hit nearly 10 percent.

Still, despite widespread financial anxiety, Mr. Petro’s actions as he prepares to assume office seem to have earned him some support.

He has made repeated calls for national consensus, met with his biggest political foe, the right-wing former president Álvaro Uribe and appointed a widely respected, relatively conservative and Yale-educated finance minister.

The moves may allow Mr. Petro to govern more successfully than say Mr. Boric, said Daniel García-Peña, a political scientist, and have calmed down some fears about how he will try to revive the economy.

But given how quickly the honeymoon period ended for others, Mr. Petro will have precious little time to start delivering relief.

“Petro must come through for his voters,” said Hernan Morantes, 30, a Petro supporter and environmental activist. “Social movements must be ready, so that when the government does not come through, or does not want to come through, we’re ready.”

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HEADLINE	07/30 Bin Laden family \$1.2M gift UK royal charity
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/world/europe/prince-charles-bin-laden-money.html

GIST	<p>LONDON — Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, faced new scrutiny over the financing of his charities on Saturday after a report found that one organization had accepted a donation of 1 million pounds (\$1.21 million) from the family of Osama bin Laden.</p> <p>As first reported by The Sunday Times of London, The Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund received the donation in 2013 from the brothers Bakr and Shafiq bin Laden, half brothers of Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al Qaeda and architect of the Sept. 11 attacks.</p> <p>News of the payment follows a series of recent royal scandals, including a report in June that Prince Charles had accepted \$3.1 million in cash donations from a Qatari billionaire between 2011 and 2015, some of which was received personally in a suitcase and shopping bags.</p> <p>The bin Ladens are a powerful Saudi family, whose multinational construction business and close ties to the Saudi royal family have made them extremely wealthy. There is, however, no suggestion that either Bakr or Shafiq bin Laden has sponsored, supported or been involved in any acts of terrorism. And the family disowned Osama bin Laden in 1994 when Saudi Arabia stripped him of his citizenship because of his extremist activities.</p> <p>On Saturday, Clarence House, the prince’s official office and residence, confirmed that the bin Laden brothers had given the money to the royal charity but disputed reports that Prince Charles had brokered the deal or made the decision personally to accept it.</p> <p>“The Prince of Wales’ Charitable Fund has assured us that thorough due diligence was undertaken in accepting this donation,” read a statement released by Clarence House.</p> <p>“The decision to accept was taken by the charity’s trustees alone and any attempt to characterize it otherwise is false,” the statement added.</p> <p>But The Sunday Times reported that Prince Charles had brokered the payment after a private meeting with Bakr bin Laden at Clarence House in London on October 30, 2013, two years after Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan.</p> <p>The paper also reported that the heir to the throne had agreed to accept the donation despite the vocal objections of his own advisers.</p> <p>A royal official, unauthorized to speak publicly, denied that the prince accepted the donation, negotiated the deal or was advised to return the money.</p> <p>The Sunday Times reported that some of the prince’s aides had warned Charles of the inevitable blowback should it become known that his charity had accepted money from the family of the man who orchestrated the terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, including 67 Britons.</p> <p>Founded in 1979, The Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund says that its mission is “to transform lives and build sustainable communities by awarding grants to a wide range of good causes within our core funding themes: heritage and conservation, education, health and well-being, social inclusion, environment and countryside.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 China rocket debris falls over India Ocean
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/science/china-rocket-debris-fall.html
GIST	Debris from a large Chinese rocket re-entered Earth’s atmosphere over the Indian Ocean at 12:45 p.m. Eastern time, according to the U.S. Space Command .

In an update [posted on the social networking site Weibo](#), the Chinese Manned Space Agency said most of the debris had burned up on re-entry over the Sulu Sea, a body of water between the island of Borneo and the Philippines.

The possibility, however slight, that debris from the rocket could strike a populated area had led people around the world to track its trajectory for days.

The administrator of NASA, Bill Nelson, issued a rebuke on Saturday, saying that China “did not share specific trajectory information as their Long March 5B rocket fell back to Earth.” He added that all countries should “share this type of information in advance to allow reliable predictions of potential debris impact risk, especially for heavy-lift vehicles, like the Long March 5B, which carry a significant risk of loss of life and property.”

The rocket Mr. Nelson referred to in his statement launched last Sunday, carrying to orbit a laboratory module that was added to China’s space station, Tiangong. Usually, the large booster stages of rockets immediately drop back to Earth after they are jettisoned. But the 23-ton core stage of the Long March 5B accompanied the space station segment all the way to orbit.

Because of friction caused by the rocket rubbing against air at the top of the atmosphere, it soon began losing altitude, making what is called “uncontrolled re-entry” back to Earth. In recent days, space watchers had projected potential re-entries over much of the planet. Within the last day, the prediction became more precise, but even then forecasters were unsure whether it would come down over the Indian Ocean, off Mexico or in the Atlantic.

People in Sarawak, a province of Malaysia on the island of Borneo, reported sightings of the rocket debris on social media, with many believing the pyrotechnics at first to be a [meteor shower](#) or a [comet](#).

This was the third flight of Long March 5B, China’s largest rocket. The country’s space program needed such a large, powerful vehicle to carry parts to orbit for the assembly of its space station.

On its first test flight in 2020, it lofted a reusable astronaut capsule with no crew aboard to orbit. That booster fell on villages in Ivory Coast in western Africa, causing some property damage but no injuries. The second flight carried Tianhe, the main module of Tiangong, the new space station, last year and splashed down in the Indian Ocean. This launch added Wentian, the laboratory module.

The Long March 5B contained multiple pieces. Four side boosters dropped off shortly after the launch, crashing harmlessly in the Pacific Ocean. (Disposing of used, unwanted rocket pieces in the ocean is a common practice.) But the core booster stage — a 10-story cylinder weighing 23 tons empty — carried the Wentian module into orbit.

The installation of the lab advances the progress of a second outpost in orbit where humanity is able to conduct scientific research in a microgravity environment.

China plans to operate the new Tiangong station for at least a decade, inviting other nations to take part. Tiangong is smaller than the aging International Space Station, which is to be retired in 2030 under NASA’s current plans, although Russia has given conflicting signs of how long it will continue to participate.

In recent decades, rocket stages that reach orbit typically fire the engine again after releasing their payloads so that they drop out of orbit, aimed at an unoccupied area like the middle of an ocean.

Typically 20 percent to 40 percent of a rocket or satellite survives re-entry, which would suggest that 10,000 to 20,000 pounds of the Chinese booster would reach Earth’s surface.

	<p>One more laboratory module is to be launched using the same rocket in October, completing construction of the space station. A final mission for the rocket is planned for 2023, transporting an orbital space telescope.</p> <p>Experts say that the designers of the rocket had alternatives to his approach. They could have had the booster stop firing before reaching orbit. It would then immediately fall back to Earth in the Pacific. But then they would have had to augment the propulsion systems on the space station module to take it the rest of the way to orbit.</p> <p>Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist at the Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Mass., who tracks space debris, suggested that the Chinese might have been able to employ a trick similar to what NASA engineers did more than 40 years ago with the Saturn 1B rocket. The second stage of the Saturn 1B was large and, like the Long March 5B booster, did not have thrusters to control the re-entry.</p> <p>“They actually did something clever in terms of venting the fuel,” Dr. McDowell said. “They didn’t actually have a rocket engine ignition, but they vented the fuel in such a way as to lower the perigee into the atmosphere.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Liquidators manage retail bubble fallout
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/business/retail-returns-liquidation.html
GIST	<p>PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Once upon a time, when parents were scrambling to occupy their children during pandemic lockdowns, bicycles were hard to find. But today, in a giant warehouse in northeastern Pennsylvania, there are shiny new Huffys and Schwinnns available at big discounts.</p> <p>The same goes for patio furniture, garden hoses and portable pizza ovens. There are home spas, Rachael Ray’s nonstick pans and a backyard firepit, which promises to make “memories every day.”</p> <p>The warehouse is run by Liquidity Services, a company that collects surplus and returned goods from major retailers like Target and Amazon and resells them, often for cents on the dollar. The facility opened last November and is operating at exceptionally high volumes for this time of year.</p> <p>The warehouse offers a window into a reckoning across the retail industry and the broader economy: After a two-year binge of consumer spending — fueled by government checks and the ease of e-commerce — a nasty hangover is taking hold.</p> <p>With consumers cutting down on discretionary purchases because of high inflation, retailers are now stuck with more inventory than they need. While overall spending rebounded last month, some major retailers say shoppers are buying less clothing, gardening equipment and electronics and focusing instead on basics like food and gas.</p> <p>Adding to that glut are all the things people bought during the pandemic — often online — and then returned. In 2021, shoppers returned an average of 16.6 percent of their purchases, up from 10.6 percent in 2020 and more than double the rate in 2019, according to an analysis by the National Retail Federation, a trade group, and Apriss Retail, a software and analytics firm.</p> <p>Last year’s returns, which retailers are not always able to resell themselves, totaled \$761 billion in lost sales. That, the retail federation noted, is more than the annual budget for the U.S. Department of Defense.</p> <p>It’s becoming clear that retailers badly misjudged supply and demand. Part of their miscalculation was caused by supply chain delays, which prompted companies to secure products far in advance. Then, there is the natural cycle of booms — whether because of optimism or greed, companies rarely pull back before it’s too late.</p>

“It is surprising to me on some level that we saw all that surge of buying activity and we weren’t collectively able to see that it was going to end at some point,” J.D. Daunt, chief commercial officer at Liquidity Services, said in an interview at the Pennsylvania warehouse earlier this month.

“You would think that there would be enough data and enough history to see that a little more clearly,” he added. “But it also suggests that times are changing and they are changing fast and more dramatically.”

Strong consumer spending may have saved the economy from ruin during the pandemic, but it has also led to enormous excess and waste.

Retailers have begun to slash prices on inventory in their stores and online. Last Monday, [Walmart issued](#) the industry’s latest warning when it said that its operating profits would drop sharply this year as it cut prices on an oversupply of general merchandise.

Many companies cannot afford to let discounted items linger on their shelves because they have to make room for new seasonal goods and the necessities that consumers now prefer. While some retailers are discounting the surplus within their stores, many would rather avoid holding big sales themselves for fear of hurting their brands by conditioning buyers to expect big price cuts as the norm. So retailers look to liquidators to do that dirty work.

Additionally, industry executives say the glut is so large that some retailers could run out of space to house it all.

“It’s unprecedented,” said Chuck Johnston, a former Walmart executive, who is now chief strategy officer at goTRG, a firm which helps retailers manage returns. “I have never seen the pressure in terms of excess inventory as I am seeing right now.”

So, much of the industry’s flotsam and jetsam washes up in warehouses like this one, located off Interstate 81, a few exits from the President Biden Expressway in Scranton, the president’s hometown.

The giant facility is part of an industrial park that was built [above a reclaimed strip mine](#) dating back to when this region was a major coal producer. Today, the local economy is home to dozens of e-commerce warehouses that cover the hilly landscape like giant spaceships, funneling goods to the population centers in and around New York and Philadelphia.

Liquidity Services, a publicly traded company founded in 1999, decided to open its new facility as close as it could to the Scranton area’s major e-commerce warehouses, making it easy for retailers to dispense with their unwanted and returned items.

Even before the inventory glut appeared this spring, returns had been a major problem for retailers. The huge surge in e-commerce sales during the pandemic — increasing more than 40 percent in 2020 from the previous year — has only added to it.

The National Retail Federation and Appriss Retail calculate that more than 10 percent of returns last year involved fraud, including people wearing clothing and then sending it back or stealing goods from stores and returning them with fake receipts. But more fundamentally, industry analysts say the increasing returns reflect consumer expectations that everything can be taken back.

“It’s getting worse and worse,” Mr. Johnston said.

Some of the returns and excess inventory will be donated to charities or returned to the manufacturers. Others get recycled, buried in landfills or [burned in incinerators](#) that generate electricity.

Liquidators say they offer a more environmentally responsible option by finding new buyers and markets for unwanted products, both those that were returned and those that were never bought in the first place.

“We are reducing the carbon footprint,” said Tony Sciarrotta, executive director of the Reverse Logistics Association, the industry trade group. “But there is still too much going to landfills.”

Retailers will probably receive only a fraction of the items’ original value from the liquidators but it makes more sense to take the losses and move the goods off the store shelves quickly.

Still, liquidation can be a sensitive topic for the big companies that want customers to focus on their “A-goods,” not the failures.

Mr. Sciarrotta calls it “the dark side” of retail.

On a tour through the Pennsylvania warehouse, Mr. Daunt and the warehouse manager, Trevor Morgan, said they were not allowed to discuss where the products originated. But it was not difficult to figure out.

An 85-inch flat-screen TV had an Amazon Prime sticker still on the box. Bathroom vanities came from Home Depot. There was a “home theater” memory foam futon with a built-in cup holder from a Walmart return center.

Many unopened boxes on the warehouse floor carried the familiar bull’s-eye logo of Target. Air fryers, baby strollers and towering stacks of Barbie’s “Dream House,” which features a swimming pool, elevator and a home office. (Even Barbie, it seems, has grown tired of working from home.)

When Target’s sales exploded during the first year of the pandemic, the company was a darling of Wall Street. But in May, the retailer said it was stuck with an oversupply of certain goods and the company’s stock price plummeted nearly 25 percent in one day. Other retailers’ share prices have also fallen.

Target’s stumbles have been an opportunity for people like Walter Crowley.

Mr. Crowley regularly rents a U-Haul and drives back and forth to the liquidation warehouse from his home near Binghamton, N.Y.

Mr. Crowley, who turns 54 next month, focuses mostly on discounted home improvement goods, which he resells to local contractors, like multiple pallets of discontinued garage door openers, tiles and flooring.

But on a sweltering day earlier this month, he stood outside the warehouse in his U-Haul loading up on items from Target.

“I saw its stock got tanked,” said Mr. Crowley, a cigarette dangling from his mouth and sweat pouring down his face. “It’s an ugly situation for them.”

He bought several cribs, a set of sheets for his own house and a pink castle for a girl in his neighborhood who just turned 5.

“I end up giving a lot of it away to my neighbors, to be honest,” he said. “Some people are barely getting by.”

The buyers bid for the goods through online auctions and then drive to the warehouse to pick up their winnings.

It’s a diverse group. There was a science teacher who stocked up on plastic parts for his class, as well as a woman who planned to resell her purchases — neon green Igloo coolers, a table saw, baby pajamas — in the Haitian and Jamaican communities of New York. She ships other items to Trinidad.

The Pennsylvania warehouse, one of eight that Liquidity Service operates around the country, employs about 20 workers, some of whom have been hired on a temporary basis. The starting pay is \$17.50 an hour.

Charles Benincasa, 39, is a temporary worker who has had numerous “warehousing” jobs, the most recent at the Chewy pet food distribution center in nearby Wilkes-Barre.

Mr. Benincasa said his friends and family had gotten in the habit of returning many of the goods they buy online. But as he’s watched the boxes pile up in the Liquidity Services warehouse, he worries about the implications for the economy.

“Companies are losing a lot of money,” he said. “There is no free lunch.”

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HEADLINE	07/30 Flooded Kentucky weary: another disaster
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/us/kentucky-flooding-natural-disasters.html
GIST	<p>HAZARD, Ky. — Firefighters and National Guard crews have swarmed into eastern Kentucky after days of deadly flooding, rescuing by the hundreds people who found themselves trapped in the perilous water.</p> <p>Also preparing to send a delegation: the tiny community of Bremen, Ky., nearly 300 miles away. When Bremen was shredded last year by one of the worst tornadoes in state history, the mayor from a little town in the eastern part of the state came to help with the cleanup. That town, Hindman, was among the hardest hit in this week’s floods. So the mayor of Bremen immediately began planning trips across the state with trucks full of supplies — even as his own community continued to rebuild.</p> <p>“I said, ‘You were here in December and helped us,’” Mayor Allen Miller of Bremen told the mayor of Hindman in a phone call. “‘Now it’s time for me to return the favor.’”</p> <p>Officials have held up efforts like these as a testament to a kind of generosity ingrained in the culture of Kentucky, a spirit forged over generations of hardship in which communities had to rely on one another to pull through.</p> <p>But that cycle of support is also a grave reminder of the turbulence wrought by natural disaster that has gripped the state in recent months and will make recovery from the latest calamity all the more difficult. Officials said on Saturday that at least 25 people had been killed in the floods, but it could take weeks for the full magnitude of the human toll and physical devastation to become clear.</p> <p>“I wish I could tell you why we keep getting hit here in Kentucky,” Gov. Andy Beshear said during a briefing in which he updated residents on the rising death toll and displayed a sense of anguish and exhaustion that many in the state have felt after recurring disasters, including a powerful ice storm last year that cut off power to 150,000 people in eastern Kentucky, a flash flood last July that left many stranded in their homes and the rare December tornadoes that carved a nearly 200-mile path of destruction and killed 80 people.</p> <p>“I wish I could tell you why areas where people may not have much continue to get hit and lose everything,” the governor went on. “I can’t give you the why, but I know what we do in response to it. And the answer is everything we can.”</p> <p>These disasters — particularly the flooding and tornadoes — would be staggering setbacks for any community. But here, they have been especially calamitous, striking rural areas that were already deeply vulnerable after decades of decline.</p> <p>“These places were not thriving before,” said Jason Bailey, the executive director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, a nonpartisan think tank, noting the erosion of the coal industry and loss of manufacturing jobs. “To even get back to where they were is a long road.”</p> <p>For communities inundated by the powerful floods, that road has only begun.</p>

The worst of the devastation has been concentrated in roughly a half-dozen counties in the Appalachian region on the eastern edge of the state. At least 14 people, including four children, died in Knott County, officials said. More than 1,400 people have been rescued by boat and helicopter, and thousands remain without electricity.

Homes were pulled from their foundations. Bridges have washed out, leaving some remote communities inaccessible. "I've seen ditches formed where there weren't ditches because of the rushing water," said Dan Mosley, the judge-executive for Harlan County.

His community experienced only minor flooding, he said, so for the past several days, he has accompanied workers from the county Transportation Department with dump trucks equipped with snow plows to clear out roads blocked by muck and debris in neighboring communities. The worst destruction he saw was in Knott and Letcher County.

"The pure catastrophic loss is hard to put into words," he said. "I've just never seen anything like this in my career or even my life."

In Breathitt County, at least four deaths had been confirmed, roughly a dozen people were missing and much of the county remained underwater. Many homes in the sparsely populated county were still inaccessible. The community was already struggling to find its footing after the last flood.

"We had another flood, a record flood, not 12 months ago, and a lot of families had just started getting their lives back on track," said Hargis Epperson, the county coroner. "Now it's happened all over again, worse this time. Everybody's lost everything, twice."

In Hazard, a city of just over 5,200 people in Perry County, 24 adults, five children and four dogs had taken shelter at First Presbyterian Church — a number that was almost certain to climb in the coming days. Their homes had been flooded or wiped out by a mudslide.

Some of them arrived soaking wet and caked in mud, said Tracy Counts, a Red Cross worker at the church. All she had to offer them was baby wipes; there was no running water.

"It's making it a harder puzzle to solve, but we're adapting and making it happen," Ms. Counts said. "It's just hard to ask for help when we're all in the same boat."

Melissa Hensley Powell, 48, was brought to the church after being rescued from her home in Hardshell, an unincorporated area of Breathitt County. She and her boyfriend had pulled her brother, who is paralyzed, out of their house and then carried out a mattress for him to lie on. They kept him dry by holding garbage bags and umbrellas over him.

Two days after her rescue, while having a lunch of Little Caesars pizza and bottled water, she said the gravity of what she had endured was soaking in. "It's starting to," she said. "We're still in that adrenaline rush."

At the church, one congregant has rented portable toilets. People have dropped off water, blankets and dog food, the donated items filling some of the pews.

"I know people have this image of Eastern Kentucky," Ms. Counts said, acknowledging the painful perception among outsiders of the region as poor and backward. "But we are the first ones to step up. We are the first ones to ask, 'How can we help?'"

But now, an onslaught of disasters was testing that spirit of support in profound ways.

It is difficult to link a single weather event to climate change, but the flooding and tornadoes have highlighted the vulnerabilities that Kentucky faces. For some, it has also underscored the failures to

prepare, as experts warn of heavier rainfall, flash floods that are becoming shorter in span but more powerful in magnitude, and weather patterns overall becoming more erratic.

“Let’s be aware that this a new normal of incredibly catastrophic events, which are going to hit our most vulnerable communities,” said Alex Gibson, the executive director of Appalshop, the arts and education center in Whitesburg, Ky., comparing the litany of flooding disasters in eastern Kentucky with the devastation faced by poor island nations around the world in the era of climate change.

In the vast stretches of the state now contending with the aftermaths of flooding and tornadoes, Mr. Bailey said, the infrastructure had already been inadequate and the communities had been impoverished. “We have people who are living on the edge,” he said.

“So much of the wealth has been extracted,” he said. “In a topography that has been stripped, literally, of trees and mountainsides, flooding in particular becomes more likely, more risky, more dangerous — that’s what we’re seeing.”

And as much as the communities want to rely on one another to recover from the devastation, it would be difficult to summon the necessary resources on their own.

“The strain has been immense,” Judge Mosley, who is also an officer in the Kentucky Association of Counties, said of the widespread consequences from major disasters.

Without outside support, “this would be unsurvivable,” he said. “The federal government’s resources and our faith in God is the only thing that’s going to get us through this.”

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HEADLINE	07/30 US official: Russia war effort failing
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/world/europe/us-russia-war-effort-failing.html
GIST	<p>The Ukrainian military repelled attempted Russian advances in eastern Ukraine and pounded critical Russian logistical hubs overnight into Saturday as Russia continued to bombard towns and cities along the 400-mile front line.</p> <p>Ukraine made small but steady gains in the southern region of Kherson, a port city in the south where thousands of Russian soldiers are now largely isolated after Ukrainian strikes on key supply routes.</p> <p>A senior U.S. Defense Department official acknowledged those advances at a news briefing on Friday and said there was growing evidence that steep Russian losses had left some units ill-prepared to fight.</p> <p>The official described Russia’s recent efforts as a failure both on the battlefield and at home, where Moscow’s rhetoric about its ambitions in Ukraine has grown more bombastic in recent days. Senior Kremlin officials have talked of regime change in Kyiv, and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev of Russia posted a map on his Telegram channel depicting a Ukraine swallowed up by Russia and its neighbors.</p> <p>Although Russia’s forces are trying to push deeper into the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, they have not been able to break through Ukrainian defenses, according to Ukrainian and Western officials.</p> <p>“Throughout July, the occupiers have been trying to storm Donetsk region,” Serhii Haidai, the head of the military administration in neighboring Luhansk Province, said in a statement. But unlike with the Russians’ push in the spring and early summer, when they could use their significant artillery advantage to flatten areas before advancing, Mr. Haidai said the Ukrainians’ destruction of Russian ammunition depots had “made it much more difficult for them to replenish arms stocks and maneuver.”</p> <p>Still, he said, Russian forces continued “to destroy settlements, employing barrel and jet artillery.” At least six civilians were killed and 15 others were injured by Russian shelling in the Donetsk region on Friday, local Ukrainian officials said.</p>

	<p>On the southern front, at least one civilian in the port city of Mykolaiv died when a Russian missile struck a high-rise building overnight, according to Vitalii Kim, the local governor.</p> <p>Residents of Nikopol — a town just across the Dnipro River from Russian-controlled territory surrounding the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant — weathered another night of heavy shelling. The attack hit more than a dozen residential homes and caused a widespread power outage, according to local officials.</p> <p>The Ukrainians have accused the Russians of using the nuclear power plant as a military base, assuming that the Ukrainians will not fire on it given the risks involved. But Ukrainian officials said on Saturday that their country's military had hit Russian positions in the town where the plant is located, Enerhodar.</p> <p>"It was really hot in Enerhodar, literally," the town's exiled mayor, Dmytro Orlov, said in a statement. He said three units of Russian military equipment, parked at the entrance to a local hotel, had been destroyed.</p> <p>While the Russians were working to repair a vital bridge over the Dnipro River further south near the city of Kherson, the Ukrainians said that it remained impassable and that Russian forces based on the western side of the river were largely isolated from resupply and support.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Russians force Ukrainians accept rule
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/world/europe/russia-occupation-ukraine-kherson.html
GIST	<p>They have handed out Russian passports, cellphone numbers and set-top boxes for watching Russian television. They have replaced Ukrainian currency with the ruble, rerouted the internet through Russian servers and arrested hundreds who have resisted assimilation.</p> <p>In ways big and small, the occupying authorities on territory seized by Moscow's forces are using fear and indoctrination to compel Ukrainians to adopt a Russian way of life. "We are one people," blue-white-and-red billboards say. "We are with Russia."</p> <p>Now comes the next act in President Vladimir V. Putin's 21st-century version of a war of conquest: the grass-roots "referendum."</p> <p>Russia-appointed administrators in towns, villages and cities like Kherson in Ukraine's south are setting the stage for a vote as early as September that the Kremlin will present as a popular desire in the region to become part of Russia. They are recruiting pro-Russia locals for new "election commissions" and promoting to Ukrainian civilians the putative benefits of joining their country; they are even reportedly printing the ballots already.</p> <p>Any referendum would be totally illegitimate, Ukrainian and Western officials say, but it would carry ominous consequences. Analysts both in Moscow and Ukraine expect that it would serve as a prelude to Mr. Putin's officially declaring the conquered area to be Russian territory, protected by Russian nuclear weapons — making future attempts by Kyiv to drive out Russian forces potentially much more costly.</p> <p>Annexation would also represent Europe's biggest territorial expansion by force since World War II, affecting an area several times larger than Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula that Mr. Putin took over in 2014.</p> <p>The prospect of another annexation has affected the military timetable as well, putting pressure on Kyiv to try a risky counteroffensive sooner, rather than waiting for more long-range Western weapons to arrive that would raise the chances of success.</p> <p>"Carrying out a referendum is not hard at all," Vladimir Konstantinov, the speaker of the Russian-imposed Crimean Parliament, said in a phone interview this week. "They will ask: 'Take us under your guardianship, under your development, under your security.'"</p>

Mr. Konstantinov, a longtime pro-Russia politician in Crimea, sat next to Mr. Putin at the Kremlin when the Russian president signed the document annexing the peninsula to Russia. He also helped organize the Crimean “referendum” in which 97 percent voted in favor of joining Russia — a result widely rejected by the international community as a sham.

Now, Mr. Konstantinov said, he is in constant touch with the Russian-imposed occupying authorities in the neighboring Kherson region, which Russian troops captured early in the war. He said that the authorities had told him a few days ago that they had started printing ballots, with the aim of holding a vote in September.

Kherson is one of four regions in which officials are signaling planned referendums, along with Zaporizhzhia in the south and Luhansk and Donetsk in the east. While the Kremlin claims it will be up to the area’s residents to “determine their own future,” Mr. Putin last month hinted he expected to annex the regions outright: he compared the war in Ukraine with Peter the Great’s wars of conquest in the 18th century and said that, like the Russian czar, “it has also fallen to us to return” lost Russian territory.

At the same time, the Kremlin appears to be keeping its options open by offering few specifics. Aleksei Chesnakov, a Moscow political consultant who has advised the Kremlin on Ukraine policy, said Moscow viewed referendums on joining Russia as its “base scenario” — though preparations for a potential vote were not yet complete. He declined to say whether he was involved in the process himself.

“The referendum scenario looks to be realistic and the priority in the absence of signals from Kyiv about readiness for negotiations on a settlement,” Mr. Chesnakov said in a written response to questions. “The legal and political vacuum, of course, needs to be filled.”

As a result, a scramble to mobilize the residents of Russian-occupied territories for a referendum is increasingly visible on the ground — portrayed as the initiative of local leaders.

The Russian-appointed authorities of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, for instance, announced this week that they were forming “election commissions” to prepare for referendums, which one official said could happen on Sept. 11 — a day when local and regional elections are scheduled to be held across Russia.

The [announcement](#) invited residents to apply to join the election commission by submitting a passport copy, education records and two I.D.-size photographs.

Officials are accompanying preparations for a vote with an intensified propaganda campaign — priming both the area’s residents as well as the domestic audience in Russia for a looming annexation. A new pro-Russian newspaper in the Zaporizhzhia region titled its second issue last week with the headline: “The referendum will be!” On the marquee weekly news show on Russian state television last Sunday, a report promised that “everything is being done to ensure that Kherson returns to its historical homeland as soon as possible.”

“Russia is beginning to roll out a version of what you could call an annexation playbook,” John Kirby, the spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, said this month, comparing the referendum preparations with the Kremlin’s moves in 2014 to try to justify its annexation of Crimea. “Annexation by force will be a gross violation of the U.N. Charter and we will not allow it to go unchallenged or unpunished.”

In Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, officials say any referendum on merging with Russia or forming a Russian client state in occupied areas would be illegal, riddled with fraud and do nothing to legitimize land seizures.

For Ukrainian civilians, the occupation has been accompanied by myriad hardships, including shortages of cash and medicine — a situation the Russians try to exploit to win allegiance from locals by distributing “humanitarian aid.”

Those seeking a sense of normalcy are being incentivized to apply for a Russian passport, which is now required for things like registering a motor vehicle or certain types of businesses; newborns and orphans are [automatically registered as Russian citizens](#).

“There’s no money in Kherson, there’s no work in Kherson,” said Andrei, 33, who worked in the service department of a car dealership in the city before the war. He left his home in the city with his wife and small child in early July and moved to western Ukraine.

“Kherson has returned to the 1990s when only vodka, beer and cigarettes were for sale,” he said. After taking control in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, Russian forces sought out pro-Kremlin Ukrainian officials and installed them in government positions.

At the same time, they engaged in a continuing campaign to stifle dissent that included abducting, torturing and executing political and cultural leaders who were deemed a threat, according to witnesses interviewed by The New York Times, Western and Ukrainian officials, and independent humanitarian groups like Human Rights Watch.

Russian occupiers cut off access to Ukrainian cellular service, and limited the availability of YouTube and a popular messaging app, Viber. They introduced the ruble and started changing the school curriculum to the Russian one — which increasingly [seeks to indoctrinate children with Mr. Putin’s worldview](#).

A top priority appears to have been to get locals watching Russian television: Russian state broadcasting employees in Crimea were deployed to Kherson to start a news show called “Kherson and Zaporizhzhia 24,” and set-top boxes giving access to the Russian airwaves were distributed for free — or even delivered to residents not able to pick them up in person.

In an interview late last month, Ihor Kolykhaiev, the mayor of the city of Kherson since 2020, said the Russian propaganda, coupled with the feeling of being abandoned by the government in Kyiv, was slowly succeeding in changing the perceptions of some residents who have stayed behind — mainly pensioners and people with low incomes.

“I think that something is changing in relationships, probably in people’s habits,” he said, estimating that 5 to 10 percent of his constituents had changed their mind because of the propaganda.

“This is an irreversible process that will happen in the future,” he added. “And that’s what I’m really worried about. Then it will be almost impossible to restore it.”

Mr. Kolykhaiev spoke in a video interview from a makeshift office in Kherson. Days later, his assistant announced he had been abducted by pro-Russian occupying forces. As of Friday, he had not been heard from.

Mr. Putin has referred to Kherson and other parts of Ukraine’s southeast as Novorossiia, or New Russia — the region’s name after it was conquered by Catherine the Great in the 18th century and became part of the Russian Empire. In recent years, nostalgia in the region for the Soviet past and skepticism of the pro-Western government in Kyiv [still lingered among older generations](#), even as the region was forging a new Ukrainian identity.

But early in the occupation this spring, residents of Kherson gathered repeatedly for large, boisterous protests to challenge Russian troops even if they provoked gunfire in response. This open confrontation has largely ended, according to a 30-year-old lifelong Kherson resident, Ivan, who remains in the city and asked that his last name be withheld because of the risks of speaking out publicly.

	<p>“As soon as there is a large gathering of people, soldiers appear immediately,” he said by phone. “It’s really life-threatening at this point.”</p> <p>Still signs of resistance are evident, residents said.</p> <p>“Our people go out at night and paint Ukrainian flags,” said another man, Andrei. “In yellow and blue letters they paint, ‘We believe in the Ukrainian Armed Forces.’”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Experts: Russia ‘running out of steam’
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/russia-running-out-steam-growing-desperate-ukraine-war-experts-1729384
GIST	<p>Officials in the United Kingdom said Friday that Russia is "running out of steam" and "growing desperate," arguing that the "illegal invasion" of the country has "backfired on the Kremlin."</p> <p>In a text-based video posted on Twitter, the U.K.'s Ministry of Defence stated that tens of thousands of Russian troops have been killed or wounded since the invasion began in late February, and that Russia is "resorting to hiring convicts and recruiting from Russia's poorest areas" in order to find more soldiers.</p> <p>The ministry adds that "several thousand of Russia's front line armoured vehicles have been destroyed," and that the nation has been "forced into a greater reliance on old Soviet-era equipment, such as personnel carriers offering limited protection, and tanks last produced in 1973."</p> <p>"Its campaign is grinding, incredibly inefficient and leaves huge destruction in its wake," the ministry continued, adding that the Kremlin is increasingly using "older, less-precise missiles for strikes, killing and injuring innocent people."</p> <p>"These outdated tactics are a sign of Russia's desperation amid its equipment shortages and tactical deficiencies," the ministry said. "Putin's war is built on lies. Russia will not win this conflict."</p> <p>Richard Moore, the chief of the U.K.'s secret intelligence service, MI6, tweeted out the video on Saturday, and wrote: "Running out of steam..."</p> <p><i>Newsweek</i> has reached out to the Russian Foreign Ministry for comment.</p> <p>Earlier this week, the U.K.'s Ministry of Defence said that Russia's attempts to target Ukraine's anti-ship capabilities in the Black Sea are being hampered by its poor intelligence. The ministry added that Russian officials will continue "to prioritize efforts to degrade and destroy Ukraine's anti-ship capability," but that its ability to do so is "likely routinely undermined by dated intelligence, poor planning, and a top-down approach to operations."</p> <p>Also this month, the British ministry said Russia's military is being held back by poor vehicles and military equipment.</p> <p>"The ageing vehicles, weapons, and Soviet-era tactics used by Russian forces do not lend themselves to quickly regaining or building momentum unless used in overwhelming mass—which Russia is currently unable to bring to bear," the ministry wrote in an intelligence update on Twitter.</p> <p>The ministry also said that as Russia was assembling reinforcements near Ukraine this month, it was placing soldiers in "ad hoc groupings," and equipping them with poor equipment.</p> <p>"Despite President Putin's claim on 07 July 2022 that the Russian military 'has not even started' its efforts in Ukraine, many of its reinforcements are ad hoc groupings deploying with obsolete or inappropriate equipment," the ministry said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Seattle police 'Before the Badge' training
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-police-recruits-share-what-theyve-learned-new-before-badge-training/7AZYKSL36BEENJZLQS273UP3OU/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — For the first time, we're hearing from Seattle police recruits about new training they've completed with the goal of improving officers' interactions with the community.</p> <p>KIRO 7's Linzi Sheldon first reported on SPD's "Before the Badge" program in May.</p> <p>From wellness classes to meeting with people who've had trouble with the law to communicating with different community groups, the department's new training aims to enhance officers' interactions with the people they serve.</p> <p>"We're getting history of Seattle. We're getting a lot of the top, main problems going on in the city," said Omar Petty, a Seattle police recruit. "We're also getting mindfulness, which also shows us how to take care of ourselves, to be better officers for the community."</p> <p>Sheldon recently got an exclusive look inside their classroom and spoke with the first three recruits to go through the program: Omar Petty, Scott Gruber and Steve Schenck.</p> <p>Petty says when he was young, he knew coaches and teachers with law enforcement experience.</p> <p>And he himself worked 10 years in education at Seattle's Clover Park High School.</p> <p>"I worked with at-risk youth, mainly behavior," said Petty. "Dealing with kids (like) that, it may be their last shot at a normal education."</p> <p>So why switch careers now, when police are more scrutinized than ever?</p> <p>"I like to be part of the problem solving, be part of the solution," Petty said.</p> <p>Recruit Scott Gerber described joining the police department as a calling.</p> <p>"Knowing the staffing levels and seeing everything that's going on, ... I wanted to be able to help," said Gerber.</p> <p>Steve Schenck's grandfather was a Seattle police officer, as is his father.</p> <p>"I don't think policing is this stagnant thing," said Schenck. "I think it has to constantly evolve with how society evolves and how everything we do changes. So I want to be part of that change."</p> <p>Like many police departments, SPD has lost hundreds of officers since 2020.</p> <p>It was criticized over how it handled the protests that summer as well as other use-of-force incidents.</p> <p>In May, Sheldon asked Police Chief Adrian Diaz about this new training.</p> <p>"How do you measure success, and how do you measure failure?" asked Sheldon.</p> <p>"First and foremost, complaints. That interaction, is it a positive interaction? Are we treating people with respect and dignity?" said Diaz. "We're already measuring people — our department — in areas of use of force, in crisis intervention. If there is a focus on de-escalation, we're going to start to see ... drops in many of those as well."</p> <p>According to SPD, new recruits receive 720 hours of training at the state police academy, known as the Basic Law Enforcement Academy.</p>

Then, recruits receive about 250 hours of post-BLEA training and 560 hours of field training.

The department says Before the Badge adds about 200 hours at the very beginning of recruits' training, bringing the total amount of training for recruits to about 1730 hours.

But some critics say this training doesn't go far enough.

"The training is great and is important," said Howard Gale, one of the organizers of Seattle Stop, which wants full civilian oversight of police. "I think it's necessary, but it's not sufficient."

Gale says while officers have to qualify every year with their service weapon, there is no similar testing requirement for other kinds of skills.

"We don't see how good is an officer at de-escalating. How good is an officer dealing with someone from a different cultural background," said Gale. "I think the two pieces that are missing is some kind of real-world test for how much that's been taken in ... and then accountability for when you don't follow through on that training."

KIRO 7 asked SPD about that question of testing officers' crisis, de-escalation or cultural competency skills each year.

The department says the state had no qualification standard for the skills, but the department is bringing in a researcher to look at how SPD could measure them.

Sheldon also reached out to three City Council members who've called for police reform and recently voted against money for police recruiting.

But spokespeople for Councilmembers Teresa Mosqueda, Tammy Morales and Kshama Sawant told Sheldon they were unavailable or did not respond to her messages.

As the recruits head to the academy, Petty says he'll be taking lessons from these classes with him, including what he learned from a man who was in prison for more than 20 years.

"He said, 'Relationships before resources,'" quoted Petty. "He said, 'Create those relationships instead of just sending someone to rehab, because you do that and they'll be right back out doing the same thing.'"

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HEADLINE	07/30 Heat takes toll Seattle's most vulnerable
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/consistently-hot-temperatures-take-toll-on-seattles-most-vulnerable-people/
GIST	<p>The sun feels like it bears down harder on some.</p> <p>"It's stifling," said Maurice Lavon Jones, 51, a resident of affordable housing building Pacific Apartments in Pioneer Square operated by Plymouth Housing.</p> <p>Much of the low-income and public housing in Seattle is older, made of concrete or brick, and lacks air conditioning.</p> <p>After four days of temperatures reaching 90-plus degrees, some people who live in these buildings and outdoors are feeling the impact. They have fewer means to escape the effects of extreme heat and are more likely to have weakened immune systems.</p> <p>Last year, during a rare heat dome that reached 100-degree temperatures, at least five homeless people in Washington died from heat-related illness and 275 people were hospitalized in King County on a single</p>

day. This week, while there have been only 42 hospitalizations due to heat from Tuesday to Thursday, especially vulnerable people in Seattle are again struggling to cope with a [record-breaking heat wave](#).

“There is no ventilation at all. Period,” Jones said of his 106-year-old building. “One of the oldest buildings in Seattle. Think how thick that brick is and how hot it gets.”

Jones spends a lot of his time at the Bell Tower downtown, taking care of a woman in a wheelchair whom he met when they were both homeless.

He says the Bell Tower, which is owned and managed by the Seattle Housing Authority, is no better than his own building. The concrete traps heat and lacks any air conditioning. His friend doesn’t complain, but he said he knows she is suffering.

He tries to help by placing wet towels he cooled in the refrigerator on her waist, feet, neck and face.

“She’s not able to get up and get down to be able to do that for herself, and she’s stuck in that heat,” Jones said.

Jones can cope with uncomfortable conditions, he said, after 30 years on Seattle’s streets beginning when he was 12. He’s thankful for the housing organizations that have helped him be able to live inside.

“The good that they provide is first and foremost,” Jones said. “But please and thank you, send ice down here. Send water. Send some relief, some help if you can.”

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority opened several cooling sites around the city Tuesday and is keeping some cooling tents around Seattle open on Saturday as the heat wave has stretched beyond its original forecast.

The Seattle Housing Authority directed its residents to those sites, but many in public housing are older or have disabilities that make it hard to travel, especially when feeling lethargic and heavy from being baked indoors.

The Seattle Housing Authority says it can’t afford to purchase air conditioners for all of the almost 500 units of housing it owns and operates in the city. Spokesperson Kerry Coughlin says the authority is trying to open cooling areas in the community rooms at buildings where they can. But there is no cooling area at the Bell Tower because a man set fire to the building in March, damaging the community room.

The authority said it makes welfare calls on a list of residents it considers vulnerable and sometimes has cold water on hand.

Coughlin says that the housing authority will also help residents install an air conditioner if they are approved, but Candace Behuniak, who lives on the ninth floor of the building, said she and other residents can’t afford one.

Her west-facing apartment receives direct sun all afternoon. Behuniak has a box fan she got from another resident, but that’s reserved for her long-haired cat.

“It’s all about the cat,” Behuniak said. “I just hang in there.”

On Thursday, after spending the day out of her building to escape the heat, she stepped out of the elevator and let out a “whoa.”

“It was all just stagnant, and obviously we’re all just cooking up there,” Behuniak said.

She has been freezing tuna in ice cube trays this week to lower her cat's temperature from the inside, and giving it cold baths, which she says it does not like. As for herself, Behuniak said the heat has been slowing down her production as a writer and artist.

"It's just hard on your brain to keep pushing through when it's hot," Behuniak said.

Some people who live outside are contending with the heat while resettling after a forced move.

Terry Thurmond, who turned 57 a few weeks ago, was at Third Avenue South and South Holgate Street until Tuesday, when the city removed that encampment as the heat wave began. He moved with several other people a few blocks over to Sixth Avenue South.

Since then, he has just been trying to stay out of the heat.

"You pretty much don't move around a lot or you're going to dehydrate yourself or have a heatstroke," Thurmond said.

Thurmond, like a few others at the Sodo encampment, had been ready to move into a tiny home offered to him weeks before. But about a week before the clearing, he was told that space was gone. He could've gone instead to congregate shelter, where he would share space with dozens or more people in large rooms, but he doesn't want to go because he always gets sick when he goes there.

Travis Robinson, an outreach worker in Sodo for homeless services nonprofit REACH, said a shooting in an Aurora encampment meant open tiny homes were diverted to people living there, and away from people in the Sodo encampment who had been promised them.

"It would have been nice to pause (the encampment removal) until we did have some more resources and wait out the heat," Robinson said.

The City of Seattle removed three encampments during the heatwave saying it had scheduled them for weeks and was trying to bring people inside from the heat.

Robinson and another REACH outreach worker handed out cold bottles of water and Gatorade on Friday to Thurmond and the other people who had moved a few blocks over.

Thurmond got up early that day to clean up the area around his tent, but at 1 p.m. he was preparing to sleep to shut down his body during the hottest parts of the day.

But that's hard, he said, when his canvas tent traps heat and is about 10 degrees hotter inside than the air outside.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Illegal eco-blocks in Seattle public parking
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/illegally-placed-concrete-blocks-have-taken-over-public-parking-in-seattle-why-are-they-there/
GIST	<p>For the last month, Michael Diaz has been living out of a recreational vehicle parked outside Ruby Chow Park, a triangle-shaped field, where planes roar overhead as they fly into the nearby King County International Airport.</p> <p>Ahead of Memorial Day weekend, the city is asking him and nearly two dozen other RVs parked around the Georgetown park to leave.</p> <p>Red "no parking" signs have gone up and Joe Ingram, an outreach worker, asked Diaz what he needs to avoid his vehicle getting impounded.</p>

Diaz thought all he needed were some new batteries and gas. But getting the RV to move is one thing, he said, finding a place nearby to park is another.

“Where can we go from here? To the next block? Nope,” he said. “Can’t park there. They got blocks.”

These days, a significant portion of public parking in Georgetown has been blocked by large chunks of concrete, between 3 and 6 feet long. The blocks, which are sometimes referred to as “ecology” or “eco” blocks, have been placed anonymously and illegally by people hoping to prevent RVs from parking in front of their homes or business.

Large vehicles cannot park overnight in Seattle unless they are in areas [zoned for industrial use](#), concentrating RV dwellers in a few neighborhoods. Ecology blocks have followed, quietly increasing the last two years in neighborhoods like Georgetown, Ballard and Sodo as the city of Seattle [suspended parking enforcement](#) during the pandemic.

But now parking enforcement has resumed, with people living in their vehicles facing fines and the possibility of losing their shelter.

However, enforcement of the growing number of eco-blocks is almost nonexistent.

Disproportionate enforcement

It is illegal to place ecology blocks [in public streets](#), sidewalks or parking spaces. Ecology blocks cause “parking spillover into adjacent streets, block utility access and cause other accessibility or transportation problems,” according to the Seattle Department of Transportation.

Of the hundreds of concrete blocks across Seattle, only 25 unique property and business owners since June 2021 have been warned they could face fines. According to the city, violators could be charged \$250 for the first violation, \$500 for the second and \$1,000 for the third violation, with no limits on the number of fines within a year.

While the department has issued second warnings to some properties, no citations have been issued.

Earlier this year, the transportation department said that it intends to step up enforcement on the [rule](#) that vehicles can only be parked on the same block for 72 hours at a time. Since October, the Seattle Department of Transportation has written 4,000 citations and impounded 2,100 vehicles, though the department says it did not impound lived-in vehicles until mid-May.

Homeless advocates say it is not fair that the city expects vehicle dwellers to obey parking laws when it allows businesses to prevent those living in cars from following them by taking up public parking.

“The new mayor ran on a law-and-order platform and this is the law,” said Bill Kirlin-Hackett, the director of the Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness, which runs the Scofflaw Mitigation/Vehicle Residency Outreach Program. “We just find it to be quite hypocritical.”

The city says the main challenge of responding to complaints about illegal ecology blocks has been identifying who is responsible for them. Because the blocks are placed on public streets, sometimes in the vicinity of multiple properties, it is not always clear who paid for them.

While ecology blocks are typically made with excess concrete and cost around \$20 each, each block weighs 1 to 2 tons and cannot be moved without specialized equipment, making it potentially costly or burdensome for the city to remove. The department says it also only responds to ecology blocks through public complaints and does not pay for staff to “continuously patrol the city looking for violations” as it does for parking violations.

“Tow companies have a contract with the city which determines the fees they may charge for an impounded vehicle, but there is not a similar contract when it comes to moving ecology blocks,” SDOT said in a statement.

Why businesses put blocks down

Dee Powers said that blocks were occasionally placed before the pandemic but have proliferated in the last year while the city was not enforcing the 72-hour parking rule. During that time, RVs stayed put, sometimes accumulating trash and rats, and drew criticism from locals.

Powers, who previously was an outreach worker for the city-funded Scofflaw Mitigation/Vehicle Residency Outreach Program, remembers the stress of trying to find a new parking spot every few days. For around three years, Powers lived out of a 32-foot motor home in Georgetown and regularly moved their vehicle between two or three spaces to avoid impoundment.

Often Powers moved their vehicle at night when the streets were empty, sometimes swapping spots with a nearby friend. Underlying this “shuffle” of vehicles, Powers said, is an overwhelming fear of impoundment, losing your home and all your belongings, as well as harassment from local residents.

Powers said most RV dwellers have found free parking harder to come by because of blocks and no parking signs, so are more reluctant to move unless they are forced to.

Businesses often drop the blocks right after Seattle Public Utilities asks RV dwellers to temporarily leave so city workers can clean the area.

The practice is so common that when the city of Seattle removed an RV and homeless encampment along Southwest Andover Street in June, the neighboring West Seattle Health Club made no secret of its plans in a letter to its members.

“To avoid the return of the encampment, the West Seattle Health Club is partnering with our neighboring businesses to place eco-blocks along the surrounding area,” the letter said.

Eco-blocks did appear, but in an email, West Seattle Health Club general manager Chauna Agosto said the gym did not place them after the city recommended against it.

JW Harvey, one of the owners of the Orcas Business Park in Georgetown, said people who judge those who put ecology blocks on the street do not know the reality of living and working near a homeless encampment.

Over the last 10 years, but especially during the pandemic, Harvey said he has spent more time providing water and tools and speaking with the people living on the streets next to his property than he has running his business.

Harvey said he does not want to place ecology blocks around his property because they look bad and take up public parking. However, he’s growing tired of trying to manage the “ripple effects” of the homeless population in his neighborhood.

Every time the city removes an RV encampment and cleans up the garbage, it only takes a few weeks for the sidewalk to return to its former state, he said. Harvey said in his experience, residents and business owners only place ecology blocks because they feel like they have no other choice.

“Individual businesses and residents are putting ecology blocks out as taking matters in their own hands because if they call the city and say there are RVs out in front of their business or out in front of their home, they can’t do anything about it,” he said.

Erin Goodman, executive director of the Sodo Business Improvement Area, said businesses owners are concerned about the safety of their employees or worried about losing their livelihood when they place ecology blocks.

In many parts of Sodo, the rats that RV encampments can sometimes attract can put food manufacturers at risk for losing their license, she said, and fires that start in RVs can damage nearby buildings.

Although the Sodo Business Improvement Area does not recommend people break city rules, Goodman said business owners have been asking for help and are frustrated when they are threatened with citations.

“I don’t think [warnings] are going to deter anybody,” she said. “They’re still going to do it and even for the period of time before the city notices, they get a bit of relief.”

Where city stands on enforcement

Fremont Brewing’s production facility in Ballard has become a particularly criticized example of ecology blocks. The beer company is owned by Seattle City Councilmember Sara Nelson and her husband Matt Lincecum.

After receiving reports of ecology blocks around the facility, the city issued a warning to the brewery on Sept. 29, 2021, stating that citations or notice of violation could be issued if they were not removed by Nov. 10, according to records obtained by The Seattle Times.

In November, Lincecum emailed a city employee, saying he appreciated “your assurance that the [Department of Transportation] has decided to pause and reconsider how to proceed.” Lincecum said he is looking for “written confirmation that the city of Seattle has paused enforcement of the alleged street use violation for our brewery and the hundreds of other businesses also using ecoblocks,” including a substation in Ballard.

There are also ecology blocks along Northwest 46th Street next to a U.S. post office building.

“As I also reiterated, I do not want Fremont to be in violation of any city codes and have only kept the ecoblocks in place upon the reassurance from you that we are not currently in violation of Seattle City codes,” the email stated.

Lincecum and Nelson declined to comment.

After being asked about the email, the transportation department denied in a statement that it has suspended enforcement and said it has started to send out second warnings when there is not a resolution.

“Our objective is to make sure that we have correctly identified the responsible party and then to work collaboratively with them if they are willing,” the agency said in a statement. “We hope to encourage them to take responsibility for removing the unauthorized obstructions so that we can find a solution that works well for everyone.”

In the meantime, with fewer parking spaces available, RVs are pushed into other neighborhoods or residential streets and are forced to park closer together, forming clusters.

There, they draw more ire.

Garth Carroll, who has lived out of an RV for six years, said the concrete is a physical symbol of the animosity toward homeless people.

“So much of the community has so much built-up hatred against us,” Carroll said. “We’re just trying to fend for ourselves until we can get some permanent housing.”

HEADLINE	07/30 Living, working in WA fire lookout towers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/life/outdoors/93-fire-lookout-towers-remain-in-wa-heres-what-its-like-working-and-living-in-one/
GIST	<p>ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA — He spends his summers in a glass house perched thousands of feet above some of the most scenic wilderness in the world. He has a 360-degree view of spectacular sunrises and sunsets, and a front-row seat to lightning-storm shows like no other.</p> <p>A short walk from his door he can see and hear bears and other wild animals, yet he is protected from wildlife and the elements in his cozy, tiny house.</p> <p>Welcome to the world of Jim Henterly, fire watchman for the iconic Desolation Peak lookout deep in the wilderness of North Cascades National Park.</p> <p>“The general public, they romanticize lookouts,” said Henterly, who is in his seventh consecutive fire season atop 6,102-foot Desolation Peak, just east of Ross Lake and 6 miles south of the Canadian border.</p> <p>“It’s intriguing to people, I think, to hike to this remote place and you have a little bit of a home up there on this mountaintop,” Henterly said. “I know a lot of people fantasize about that. The sights and sounds of total wilderness. Just having that experience day after day. You’re protected from the environment, but you’re immersed in it.”</p> <p>As idyllic as this life may seem, Henterly isn’t just admiring the view. He’s there to — among other duties — spot smoke, locate it and send firefighters to put it out.</p> <p>“You have a purpose, not just in looking casually out the window, but you’re actually looking for something that changes out there,” Henterly said. “You’re seeking. You’re looking for something that catches your eye.”</p> <p>Like what?</p> <p>“You’re looking for movement, an object out there that just doesn’t fit a view you’re used to looking at many, many, many times a day,” the watchman said. “And studying it, and realizing, ‘That’s something I need to report. That’s smoke. That’s a fire.’”</p> <p>Ghost whisperer</p> <p>Henterly walks on hallowed ground. The famous Desolation Peak lookout was built in 1932 with materials carried by pack horses and mules up the steep, 4.7-mile trail (an elevation gain of 4,400 feet) from Ross Lake. A classic “L-4” live-in lookout common of that day, it has a 14-by-14-foot wood frame, and windows all around that can be slanted out for air flow.</p> <p>This shrine to 1930s construction, though, pales in comparison to the people who came before him. While looking for smoke, this mountaintop evangelist for the historical lookout experience is also honoring ghosts.</p> <p>The ghost of American novelist and poet Jack Kerouac, who spent 63 days there in the summer of 1956. Then in his mid-30s, Kerouac’s time on Desolation provided inspiration for his books “Desolation Angels” and “Dharma Bums.”</p> <p>The ghost of William Osborne, maker of the “Osborne Fire Finder,” a circular table about the size of an extra-large pizza used to locate smoke. By looking through crosshairs and using a topographical map along the azimuth, Henterly can reasonably pinpoint the fire location to direct aircraft or firefighting crews. Even though the Osborne Fire Finder was invented in 1934, it continues to be effective today.</p> <p>“It’s a simple device,” Henterly said. “But you’ll find it in every lookout that is still functional.”</p>

In manning the fire lookout, he also honors the ghost of U.S. Forest Service Ranger Ed Pulaski, who gallantly led the effort to fight the devastating “Big Burn” fire of 1910 in Idaho and Montana that burned 3 million acres and claimed dozens of lives.

Just outside Henterly’s lookout, charred snags from a similarly devastating fire, in 1926, remain. More than 1,000 men were sent to fight the fire that destroyed the surrounding landscape, hence the name Desolation Peak. Only the autumn rains stopped it.

“I want to maintain those stories that are important parts of this long [firefighting] history,” Henterly said.

North Cascades National Park also wants to maintain that history. The Desolation lookout’s roof was replaced in 2009. Last summer, the park’s Historic Preservation crew meticulously rebuilt the window shutters with original materials using 1930s blueprints. The shutters are critical for structural integrity during the harsh winters.

Vanishing fire lookouts

While Kerouac, Osborne and Pulaski are long gone, many fire lookouts are experiencing a similar fate. The heyday of fire lookouts in the U.S. was between 1930 and 1950. At its peak, there were 660 fire lookouts in the state of Washington, according to Forrest Clark, Western Washington director for the [Forest Fire Lookout Association](#).

Fire-spotting methods, however, have evolved over the years with technology. Forest Service and National Park Service personnel today increasingly rely on airplane flyovers, drones, satellite imaging and even automated camera systems to spot smoke.

Clark says the number of fire lookouts in the state today has dwindled to 93. Many have been dismantled, fallen down on their own or, ironically, have burned to the ground in forest fires. Clark estimates only about one-third of the 93 lookouts are currently staffed, either by U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service employees, [or by volunteers](#).

Manning the lookout is no small task. Henterly takes a Parks boat on Ross Lake to Lightning Creek Campground, near the Desolation Peak trailhead, leaving a 9.4-mile round-trip hike to the lookout. The alternate is a roughly 50-mile round-trip hike from the East Bank Ross Lake trailhead off Highway 20.

Henterly receives a helicopter supply drop at the start of the fire season, including food, propane and other supplies. Every time he goes up, roughly every 14 days, he’s bringing more supplies in his backpack.

The few fire lookouts that remain staffed are vital to firefighting efforts. Sometimes there’s no substitute for reliable “eyes in the sky.” Reconnaissance flights can be expensive and usually are only justified once every 24 hours.

Henterly recalled one incident several years ago while he was staffing a fire lookout near Wenatchee when his round-the-clock eyes were essential.

“[Recon flights would] go up after lightning busts, and I just remember calling a fire in after they’d gone over and they’d say, ‘We just flew that,’” he said. “I’d say, ‘But you’re not up 24/7,’ and I’d be calling in at 9 at night. It’s pretty amazing to have an actual person looking 24 hours day.”

Real people in lookouts who know what they’re doing can be hard to find. That’s what makes Henterly so valuable.

Henterly was heading up the trail to Desolation Peak one day in 2018 when he spotted smoke on a nearby ridge. He immediately called in the fire on his radio before he reached the lookout.

The fire on Arctic Ridge would be named by fire management “Arctic Jim.” Before it was extinguished by natural forces, it burned 880 acres. But thanks to Henterly’s alert eyes, firefighters kept it away from the national recreation area that surrounds Ross Lake.

“That was a good example of an excellent purpose for a lookout,” Henterly said. “They didn’t need to fly over it every day because they had eyeballs on it. I was watching its every move.”

“Arctic Jim” was eventually allowed to burn because it was “being managed.” The fire, Henterly said, “dropped stuff to the bottom and moved in a such way that it’s going to leave a natural scar that’s good habitat. With fires in the wilderness, the policy is we let them do their thing if it’s natural-caused. If it’s man-caused, that’s a whole different story.”

Last stop: Desolation Peak

Between the U.S. Forest and National Parks services, Henterly has 30 fire seasons of experience staffing fire lookouts. He started as a wildland firefighter, and beginning in 1979, spent nine fire seasons with wife Ann Marie as a “lookout couple” on a 90-foot-high tower overlooking the Snake River in the Wallowas in northeastern Oregon. The 68-year-old Henterly figures Desolation Peak is his last stop.

Outside of his seasonal job as a fire watchman, Henterly is a freelance illustrator, and volunteer firefighter and EMT. In between his routine “360 checks every 15 minutes” — a panoramic look with his binoculars, to look for changes in the landscape, signs of smoke, etc. — he’s able to spend time on his drawings. He also serves as a critical radio communication link for the whole park, often relaying information to people who cannot otherwise communicate with the park’s dispatch system.

Long gone are the days of spending months or even an entire summer in a fire lookout. Henterly alternates working 10 consecutive days then four days off. He usually spends a little more than 70 days in a lookout per fire season, which typically starts in late June and ends in late September.

He’s seen it all over the years from his mountaintop perch, including lightning strikes that literally go for 10 horizontal miles.

“I’ve seen how deadly it can be,” he said. “I’ve seen trees explode.”

He gets about 400 visitors to the lookout per season. And while many of them fantasize about what it would be like to do his job, Henterly goes to great lengths to extol the virtues of the lookout.

“As a firefighter, a lookout really rises to the level of an icon,” he said. “Fire lookouts hold a special place in their hearts. It was such a cool idea. Here was a place where someone spotted a fire, and actually maybe even in the earliest days, someone would go out from that spot and begin the initial attack on that fire.”

Henterly, of course, speaks from experience. He’s been that guy.

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HEADLINE	07/30 US: Russia failing to gain air superiority
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/pentagon-himars-ukraine-f-16s-russia-war-air-force-1729362
GIST	<p>American weapons have stopped Russia gaining air superiority in the Ukraine war, the Pentagon has said.</p> <p>Ukraine has used the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, to strike dozens of Russian command-and-control sites, ammunition depots, and other targets as it begins a counter-offensive to take back the key southern city of Kherson.</p> <p>In a Pentagon briefing on Friday, an unnamed senior military official praised Ukraine's use of the HIMARS and its army's ability to both shoot down Russian aircraft and stop Moscow's forces from targeting Kyiv's planes.</p>

"We know that they've been able to strike surface-to-air missile locations and to destroy some SAMs," the official said, [according to Air Force magazine](#).

"The fact that the Russians continue to not have air superiority certainly says a great deal about Ukrainians' kind of will," the official added.

The U.S. has delivered 12 HIMARS to Ukraine and will provide an additional four. However, Ukrainian defense minister Oleksii Reznikov has said his country would need "at least 100" HIMARS to reverse Russian gains in the Donbas region.

Meanwhile, Kyiv has also been calling for the U.S. and its western allies to provide combat jets and the training to fly them.

This month, U.S. Air Force chief of staff, General Charles Q. Brown Jr. [said this was under consideration](#), referring to Gripen jets from Sweden, the French-made Dassault Rafale and the Eurofighter Typhoon made by a number of countries.

Ukrainian Air Force officials have said they want their pilots to be trained on the American F-16 fighter jet, and when asked why training on them had not yet been given, the Pentagon official said that a decision had not been made on aircraft provision.

"We're looking into this question," the official said, "it is important to identify what the platforms are and will be and make sure that you're providing the right kind of training."

In the meantime, the U.S. will help transfer "significant spare parts" to keep Ukraine's Soviet-era MiG and Sukhoi jets flying, the publication reported. Newsweek has contacted the Ukrainian Defense Ministry for comment.

It comes as [British defense officials said](#) that Ukraine has successfully repelled small-scale Russian assaults near Donetsk city in the Donbas region.

The U.K. Ministry of Defence (MoD) [said](#) that Russian forces had likely established two pontoon bridges and a ferry system over the Dnipro River near [Kherson](#) to make up for Kyiv destroying nearby bridges in recent strikes using U.S. supplied rockets.

With Kherson the focus of Ukraine's counter offensive, the Ukrainian military said on Saturday it had killed scores of Russian soldiers and destroyed two ammunition dumps in fighting in the region.

Ukraine said more than 100 Russian soldiers and seven tanks had been destroyed in fighting on Friday in the region and that rail traffic over the river has been cut, potentially further isolating Russian forces west of the river from supplies in Crimea and further east, [Reuters reported](#).

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HEADLINE	07/29 Plane-parts shortage; air travel disruptions
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/airplane-parts-shortage-threatens-more-disruptions-to-air-travel-11659087181
GIST	<p>Airlines are increasingly hard-pressed to find engines and other spare parts to keep their planes flying, another complication threatening to disrupt air travel.</p> <p>Passengers this summer have faced delays and cancellations because of labor shortages that have left air carriers with too few pilots to fly planned schedules, airports without enough ground and baggage handlers to meet demand, and insufficient numbers of controllers to manage air traffic.</p> <p>The resurgent air travel has caught aircraft manufacturers and their supply chains off guard too, leaving makers of parts unable to increase production quickly enough to provide components not only for new aircraft but also for planes already back in service.</p>

[Supply-chain bottlenecks](#) that have delayed everything from [car production](#) to furniture delivery during the pandemic are now colliding with reviving demand to fly. As a result, airlines are struggling to find replacement parts to keep planes in the air, and industry officials say it has at times led to delays, cancellations and grounded aircraft.

“We’re finding it really hard to get our hands on parts,” said Steve Rossum, chief executive of Florida-based Silver Airways LLC, which [flies primarily to Caribbean destinations](#).

Mr. Rossum said one or two of his airline’s roughly 20 planes have been grounded on any given day due to needing parts, often those related to air-conditioning. One plane was marooned for more than a week with a broken axle because it was difficult to get specialized tools, he said.

German airline [Deutsche Lufthansa](#) AG [has had to ground some aircraft](#) because of waits for various components that are taking longer to source, people familiar with the matter said. Whereas the airline group had previously been able to source missing items from within Europe, it has had to broaden the search for some parts across the globe, especially for rarer items such as panels for its cabin interiors, one of the people said.

Qatar Airways has been avoiding disruptions by taking the unusual, and expensive, step of keeping aircraft—including one of its eight [Airbus](#) A380 superjumbos—on standby in case planes can’t fly because of parts shortages, said CEO Akbar Al Baker.

The airline is battling with extended turnaround times at engine-maintenance shops [caused by labor shortages](#), the executive said, adding that Qatar Airways is operating its aircraft for fewer hours a day to limit the impact of maintenance delays and avoid disruption seen across the industry, and [particularly in Europe](#).

“It’s very difficult,” Mr. Al Baker said. “I have issues in the cabin, I have issues in avionics,” he added.

Airlines are also operating with lower inventory. With the pandemic-induced [collapse in air travel](#), carriers found different assets to sell to raise cash, including their stores of spare parts, expecting a slower, yearslong recovery, said Geoff Murray, a partner at the consulting firm Oliver Wyman in Chicago.

The shortage of parts is leading to an increase in the time it takes to move an aircraft through a heavy maintenance check. For some engine types, overhauls that typically take 60 days can last up to 100 days; on airframes, heavy maintenance checks are now about seven weeks instead of four, according to Oliver Wyman.

The longer wait times are being compounded by competition for space at repair shops as airlines return to service aircraft that were parked at the start of the pandemic. Some carriers are taking parts from parked aircraft to keep others flying, according to people familiar with the matter, in part to avoid maintenance delays.

Engines are a big bottleneck. Engine makers such as CFM International, a joint venture between [General Electric](#) Co. and [Safran](#) SA, are about two months behind on deliveries of new engines, according to people familiar with the matter, while Pratt & Whitney and [Rolls-Royce Holdings](#) PLC are also facing delays, executives at those companies have said.

CFM said it was working with its suppliers to accelerate engine deliveries to plane makers. Rolls-Royce said it was working with its customers to support their operations. A spokesman for Pratt & Whitney’s parent, Raytheon Technologies Corp., referred to a statement from CEO Greg Hayes, who said that the company was managing the delays and that its engine deliveries would significantly increase later this year.

“There are shortages of spare parts, including engines, that are impacting the ability of our customers to operate efficiently,” Airbus SE CEO Guillaume Faury said, adding that there wasn’t a quick fix to the problem. “It’s going to take time,” he said.

In addition to snarling airline operations such as Lufthansa’s, Airbus has been left with about 30 “gliders,” the industry term for newly produced aircraft without engines, the European plane maker said. The company on Wednesday [cut its delivery guidance](#) for this year and slowed its ramp-up plan as suppliers battle to provide enough components to meet targets.

GE CEO Larry Culp said the engine maker is working to keep airlines up and running as it deals with [the pandemic’s sharp downturn](#) and equally abrupt recovery. “In any manufacturing business, that is a tremendous amount of adjustment in both directions over a relatively short period of time,” he said.

[Russia’s invasion of Ukraine](#) has also contributed to the strain. For example, a part used to cool hot engine air known as a heat exchanger is becoming harder to find, industry officials said. Airlines are in some cases extending the lives of the components through repairs rather than replacements, they said.

Collins Aerospace, which makes heat exchangers for certain aircraft, had relied on Russia but is now shifting production to the U.S. and U.K., a spokesman for parent company Raytheon said. He said the manufacturer expects normal production levels to return next year.

[Boeing](#) Co. commercial chief Stan Deal said the plane maker’s airline customers have so far seen minor disruptions, without significant numbers of aircraft being taken out of service as a result of parts shortages. “That’s why our vigilance—for both of us, Airbus and Boeing—[with] the supply chain to help the industry recover is really important right now,” Mr. Deal said earlier this month at a news conference in London.

[Delta Air Lines](#) Inc., an Atlanta-based carrier, hadn’t experienced significant disruptions stemming from the shortage and is working with manufacturers to increase the flow of spare parts, finance chief Daniel Janki said in a call with analysts this month. “But,” he added, “it’s day to day.”

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HEADLINE	07/30 Energy prices keep inflation high for years?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/energy-prices-inflation-fed-11659134736?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>Of all the drivers behind the dramatic rise in U.S. inflation in the past year, perhaps the most acute is the surge in energy prices. It may also be among the most persistent.</p> <p>High prices for electricity and fuel are likely to put continued pressure on inflation in coming years, forcing central banks to keep interest rates higher than otherwise.</p> <p>Prices are also likely to become more volatile, which could make it even harder for central banks to control inflation, economists say. That raises the prospect of inflationary episodes, recessions and volatile financial markets.</p> <p>“There is a risk that we’re in for an extended period of structurally higher energy prices,” said Jason Bordoff, an energy expert and co-founding dean of the Columbia Climate School at Columbia University.</p> <p>Energy shocks aren’t uncommon. Geopolitical turmoil in particular has often caused big jumps in prices, for example, after the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the Iranian revolution in 1979. But this episode is different in that higher prices are also being driven by changes in the structure of energy supply as countries try to cut carbon emissions, said Tiffany Wilding, an economist at Pimco.</p> <p>The low inflation of the prior decade was in part due to relatively cheap energy, buoyed by the shale revolution and intensified by the market-share war among OPEC members in 2014 that flooded the market with oil, said Bob Ryan, chief commodities and energy strategist at BCA Research. Energy accounted for</p>

4.1% of consumer spending from 2015 to 2019, on average—the lowest share for any five-year period since records began in 1929, outside the pandemic.

High prices drove up energy's share of consumer spending to 5% in June. Energy accounted for about a third of the 9.1% rise in consumer prices in the 12 months through June. That contribution could turn negative in the short-term if gasoline prices continue to fall. But over the long term, upward pressure is likely to persist.

Consumer prices could increase by as much as an additional 4% by the early 2030s if higher carbon costs—from sources including taxes, other government policies and changing consumer preferences—are passed on to users, according to analysis by BlackRock Investment Institute. That could add 0.4 percentage points to inflation each year if the transition to net zero emissions by 2050 is smooth, the authors found. A faster shift would push up inflation more dramatically.

In Congress, the Senate Democrats' [\\$369 billion legislative package](#) would, if passed, boost government spending on climate programs. The clean-energy provisions could put upward pressure on prices in coming years, but that might be offset by the legislation's other initiatives, economists said. An analysis by the Penn Wharton Budget Model found that the act's impact on inflation would likely be negligible. However, the deal also involves an agreement on reforming permitting procedures later this year, which could ease supply constraints if it makes it cheaper to develop clean-energy and natural-gas pipeline projects.

Central banks typically focus on the average price of a basket of goods and services rather than any single commodity when targeting inflation, usually 2%. But energy prices are unusually important because consumers tend to pay close attention to them and they are an input into most other goods and services, said Franziska Fischer, economist at Credit Suisse.

Frequent shocks, big price swings and consistently higher prices could lead consumers to anticipate more inflation, and change their behavior in a way that perpetuates it. The pass-through of higher energy prices to other goods and services, along with their volatility, could make it harder for the Federal Reserve to tell what price shocks are temporary and thus set interest rates appropriately.

"This is what makes it dangerous" for central bankers, said Ms. Fischer. "You don't want to overreact to high energy prices because that will worsen the business cycle effects. But if you ignore it for too long, then you have a real problem," she said.

The longer-term outlook is better. Over the next decade or two, energy prices should become cheaper and less volatile than they have been historically as the mix of sources shifts toward renewables, said Mr. Bordoff.

"There's a view I hear often that the transition to clean energy is going to be economically devastating, and I don't think that needs to be true. In some cases, it's going to be more expensive. But I think the dramatic declines we've seen in solar and battery costs show that over time these technologies can become a lot cheaper," he said. "And more importantly, the cost of not making the transition is much bigger from reduced crop yields and faster spreading disease to rising seas that consume coastal property and more severe weather events."

Energy prices are likely to rise in large part due to constrained supply from slumping global investment in oil and gas exploration and development, which has fallen by nearly half since prices collapsed in 2014, according to BlackRock's analysis.

The prices for power purchase agreements—long-term contracts for electricity generated by renewable systems—have gone up sharply in the last year, driven in part by high input costs, though also because permitting and the lack of grid infrastructure are causing delays. An index of the most competitive PPA prices, which broadly reflects the price at which renewable project developers are willing to sell, rose

Return to Top	<p>5.3% in the second quarter of 2022 from a quarter earlier to nearly \$42 per megawatt hour, according to LevelTen Energy, a renewable energy platform that runs PPA marketplaces in North America and Europe.</p> <p>Sluggish investment means supply of key minerals will struggle to keep up as demand accelerates during the transition. The International Energy Agency recently estimated that if the world were on track to meet Paris Agreement goals, demand would jump 40-fold for lithium and 20-fold for nickel and cobalt between 2020 and 2040.</p> <p>Renewable energy projects are also more expensive to procure and install than natural gas projects, and require upgrading the power grid in many parts of the U.S. All told, the transition process would raise the global average cost of producing and delivering each unit of electricity by 25% by 2040, compared with 2020 levels, which could be passed on to consumers' electricity bills, said Humayun Tai, senior partner who co-leads McKinsey's electric power and natural gas practice.</p> <p>"There's not enough gas and not enough renewable manufacturing capacity," and the world is reluctant to replace gas with coal, said Audun M. Martinsen, head of energy service research at Rystad Energy. Due to the shortfall, he said he expects power prices to stay high for the next 10 years.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 America's new energy crisis
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-new-energy-crisis-11659153633?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>America is wrestling with the worst energy crisis in nearly five decades, a period of high prices and limited supply. What makes this crisis different than the troubles that roiled the country in the 1970s is how it started and the fixes required to make it end.</p> <p>This current challenge began with a decade of affordable power that upended the U.S. energy world. The rise of fracking, which extracts oil and gas from shale rock, unlocked cheap domestic supplies while cleaner energy provided by wind and solar farms became far less expensive. Gasoline and oil prices fell while gas-fired power and renewable power pushed aside costlier—and politically less popular—coal and nuclear plants.</p> <p>It was an era of cheap, plentiful energy. It came undone thanks to a haphazard transition to renewable energy, reduced investment in oil and gas production, political inaction and unexpected economic forces triggered by the pandemic and lockdowns. Russia's Feb. 24 attack on Ukraine applied even more pressure to global supplies.</p> <p>The result was evident across the country this summer as demand surged well ahead of new supply. Drivers paid more than \$5 a gallon to fuel their cars and trucks for the first time ever. The price of natural gas used to heat homes and offices hit its highest mark in 14 years. Energy shortages now loom as U.S. stockpiles of everything from crude oil to petroleum products fall. Electricity grid operators have warned of controlled outages to balance supply and demand on the hottest days.</p> <p>The proposed new legislation that gained key support this past week from Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia is in part pitched as addressing some of the causes of the current energy crisis. Its passage is uncertain—and in any case the investments in new energy sources it aims to spur would take years to come to fruition.</p> <p>The deal would spend roughly \$369 billion on climate and energy programs, including tax credits for buying electric and hydrogen vehicles. It provides numerous incentives to accelerate the build-out of wind and solar farms, as well as large-scale batteries to store their output for use when production declines. It also has provisions that benefit fossil fuel companies—requiring the Interior Department to offer oil companies millions of federal acres onshore and offshore over the next decade—as well as support for nuclear power production.</p>

Part of the handshake agreement with Mr. Manchin this past week tackles another issue: construction delays on new energy projects. A separate bill could speed up these projects by making the environmental-permitting process faster. The delays are making it challenging to fill a gap left by the closure of older power plants.

Whether any new legislation brings upward or downward pressure on energy prices depends largely on how fast new regulations and incentives are rolled out and which come first, said Bart Melek, global head of commodity markets strategy at investment bank TD Securities. Energy companies face steeper costs of production when dealing with new regulatory hurdles but are slower to factor in incentives in their investment decisions.

“Once you make changes, you have to convince your board of directors that this is a good idea [and] your investors,” Mr. Melek said.

Politicians of both parties didn’t plan for the possibility of this current crisis, making it more difficult to solve. It is a major political problem for President Biden heading into a pivotal midterm election in which the highest inflation in four decades—driven in good part by soaring energy costs—is a [kitchen-table issue for voters](#).

Energy was a political issue for the president from his first week in office, when he blocked completion of the Keystone XL oil pipeline and froze new oil and gas leases on federal land. He backtracked some as gasoline prices rose, resuming the sale of leases to drill on federal lands, albeit at higher royalty prices and with fewer acres offered, and asking oil-and-gas companies to produce more.

While Mr. Biden has asked for more short-term production, he still opposes long-term fossil fuel investments that will make it difficult for the U.S. to meet carbon-reduction targets. His support for policies designed to reallocate investment from oil and gas to green power amounts to a market signal that fossil fuels are a sunset industry, say executives, making it difficult for them to invest.

Energy prices have tempered in recent weeks, as traders bracing for a global recession bet that lower economic activity will cut energy usage. Gasoline prices have fallen to less than \$4.30 a gallon recently, in part because prices got so expensive that drivers have stopped filling up as much. The U.S. also has abundant untapped fossil fuel reserves and remains far better positioned than Europe, where energy shortages this winter appear increasingly likely as imports from Russia dwindle.

But a recession [might only dent demand temporarily](#), say energy executives and analysts, and won’t reverse long-term supply issues. Demand is expected to increase for the rest of the decade, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Fracking’s fall

This crisis was unimaginable for many before 2020, when investors were plunking hundreds of billions of dollars into new petrochemical facilities and natural-gas power plants to take advantage of cheap American energy. The rise of fracking—which involves blasting underground shale rocks with a mix of water, sand and chemicals—had unlocked vast new domestic supplies of oil and gas.

From 2010 to 2019, while overall consumer prices rose 19%, energy prices paid by consumers—including gasoline, electricity and natural gas from utilities—rose just 11%, according to Labor Department data. In other words, the real price of energy fell by about 7%. During the prior decade, real energy prices rose 41%.

Coal power, which had been the leading source of power generation in the U.S. for much of the 20th century, was toppled by natural gas in 2016, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The shale boom transformed the U.S. from a net importer to a net exporter of petroleum and gas. Investors motivated by low interest rates plowed into fracking, and they triggered a gusher: The U.S. became the

world's top oil producer, surpassing Saudi Arabia. U.S. oil prices fell from about \$78 a barrel to \$58 from 2010 to 2020, lowering gasoline prices.

One shale producer that initially benefited was [Bonanza Creek Energy](#), which attracted hundreds of millions of dollars from Wall Street investors. Between 2012 and 2019, the company roughly doubled its oil and gas production from about 12,000 barrels a day to nearly 24,000 barrels a day. But the Colorado driller burned through so much cash that it was forced to declare bankruptcy.

The same problems rolled across the industry, as many companies drew on gushers of cash to drill as much as possible with little regard to profitability. Many shale wells turned out to be less productive and more expensive than predicted, and the industry lost \$300 billion more in cash than it made between 2010 and 2020, according to accounting firm Deloitte. Those losses soured investors, who began fleeing the sector. That raised oil companies' borrowing costs and shrunk their budgets.

The result is that shale companies and investors are being cautious now. They aren't producing enough energy to keep pace with rising demand, even as they now reap large profits from high commodity prices. Most shale-company budgets are still below prepandemic levels, and their spending will only equate to a 3% increase in production next year, according to [JPMorgan Chase](#) & Co.

Consider Bonanza Creek, which emerged from bankruptcy in 2017. It expanded production in 2019 and predicted more expansion in 2020 but pulled back when the pandemic took hold. It cut planned capital expenditures to around \$65 million from roughly \$225 million and laid off dozens of employees.

In November 2021, it merged with a rival to create Civitas Resources, which plans to expand production only moderately or not at all and return all excess cash to shareholders instead of plowing it into new projects. Many of Civitas' peers are pursuing similar strategies, including Exxon Mobil Corp., [Chevron](#) Corp. and [Occidental Petroleum](#).

"Financial investors subsidized oil-and-gas companies to grow volume with no regards to profit and essentially subsidized the consumer," said Ben Dell, chairman of Civitas and co-founder of private-equity firm Kimmeridge Energy Management Co., which owns a nearly 14% stake, according to S&P Capital IQ. "Now, the investors are asking for a return on their capital and, by default, the prices will be higher."

The limitations of green energy

There was a time when it also seemed like it would be relatively easy to replace many fossil-fuel plants with renewable energy and large-scale batteries that store wind and solar power for use as fossil-fuel production declines.

These energy sources became much less expensive over the last decade due to more efficient production as well as government subsidies that made renewables more attractive for investors. Renewable energy, including hydroelectric power, in 2020 became second to natural gas as a source of electricity generation in the U.S., according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

But as U.S. power supplies tighten, developers are struggling to build these projects quickly enough to offset closures of older plants, in part because of supply-chain snarls. Another reason: It takes longer to approve their connections to the existing electricity grid. Such new requests neared 3,500 last year compared with roughly 1,000 in 2015, according to research from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Typical time needed to complete technical studies needed for that grid approval is now more than three years, up from less than two in 2015.

One renewable-energy developer, Recurrent Energy, filed more than 20 of these grid-connection requests last year in California, a state that needs more clean power to replace several gas-fired power plants as well as a nuclear plant slated for retirement in the coming years. It took the company seven years to get approval and construct a separate battery storage project in that state.

“It’s only getting harder and harder to get things done in California, specifically, but in every market,” said President and General Manager Michael Arndt.

Wait times can be years for other projects that could also help alleviate energy shortages, such as [high-voltage power lines to carry electricity between regions](#), natural gas pipelines and [offshore wind farms capable of generating large amounts of clean power](#). These require land and ecological studies that many stakeholders say are critical to protecting wildlife, nearby industries and other interests.

The strain is already evident in the Midwest, where Midcontinent Independent System Operator Inc. operates a regional grid across multiple states. One of its biggest challenges, said Chief Executive John Bear, is how to replace coal- and gas-fired power plants that can produce power on demand with wind and solar farms where output fluctuates with weather and time of day.

When electricity supplies get tight, MISO calls on every available generator to produce power in what’s known as a “MaxGen” event, something that rarely occurred before 2016. Since then, MISO has had more than 40 MaxGen events, a number of which occurred outside the summer months, when demand is typically highest.

MISO this past week approved a sweeping plan to build high-voltage power lines to help balance supplies, though the projects aren’t expected to be complete until 2030. It is also considering how to better compensate power plants for operating on standby to slow the pace of closures. “The transition may require some scaffolding, and that scaffolding may be some gas plants,” Mr. Bear said.

Project delays—coupled with higher gas prices—present new challenges for utilities, too. They are paying more to produce or purchase electricity while planning big spending increases to upgrade aging infrastructure and prepare for new energy demands.

[Xcel Energy](#) Inc., a Minneapolis-based utility company serving parts of eight Western and Midwestern states, is wrestling with slowdowns on solar projects. Those include contracts with solar farms in Colorado that were scheduled to be online in late 2022 and early 2023.

Xcel, through one of its subsidiaries, is now working on contingency plans to ensure adequate supplies for next summer. It plans to invest \$26 billion between 2022 and 2026 partly so it can build more high-voltage power lines to carry more power from new wind and solar farms.

Xcel CEO Bob Frenzel said higher energy prices pose near-term challenges for the company and its customers, but he expects they will fall with time. The war in Ukraine, the pandemic and supply chain snarls, he added, would have been easier to manage if they didn’t converge.

“You put those three factors in a mixing bowl, and you come up with a bigger challenge,” Mr. Frenzel said.

‘No one knows what to do’

The actions of the U.S. government also contributed to this current crisis. Federal decisions made over the last three decades to encourage competition, lower costs for consumers, sell oil and gas to foreign buyers and encourage the development of more renewable sources are having unintended consequences now that the energy market is in turmoil.

It began with the decision to deregulate the electricity industry, a movement that first gained support following the energy shortages of the 1970s and gathered more momentum with the 1992 passage of the Energy Policy Act, which encouraged competition among wholesale electricity suppliers. The federal government also lifted price caps on natural gas and created incentives for more renewable energy sources to take root in markets around the country, hoping to prop up technologies that didn’t rely on oil and gas.

What this new system created in the subsequent decades was a patchwork of markets across much of the country with different regional operators, leaving state regulators and power grid managers to do much of

the planning. Coordination across regions became more challenging as states set different goals to reduce carbon emissions.

Consider what happened in California when the state experienced rolling blackouts in 2020 after temperatures rose across the West. The state had substantially reduced its reliance on gas-fired power plants in recent years in favor of renewable energy, giving way to evening supply crunches on hot days when solar production tapers off. California has historically imported a lot of power from neighboring states in times of need, but it was constrained in its ability to do so during the 2020 heat wave because neighboring states also had numerous plants close and thus had less power to spare.

“You had too much capacity come off the market too quickly and now all the markets are scrambling for reliability,” said John Arnold, a former natural gas trader who now is a billionaire philanthropist. Presidents Obama, Trump and Biden all encouraged U.S. exports of liquefied natural gas. The U.S. became the world’s top LNG exporter this year as it sent huge volumes to Europe to help replace Russian supplies. But those same exports are now driving up domestic gas prices because U.S. consumers are effectively competing for supplies with foreign buyers, say analysts, and [will keep prices elevated for years](#) to come due to long-term supply contracts signed by exporters.

The U.S. government has more recently taken steps to help with the nation’s transition to renewable energy sources. For example, it expanded its authority to intervene in state-level permitting processes for high-voltage power lines as a way of helping balance electricity supply and demand across regions. Mr. Biden is also trying to lower high energy prices by asking Saudi Arabia, which he had vowed to treat as a “pariah” after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, to pump more crude. He traveled there earlier this month.

One former regulator said the current situation reminds him of a period five decades ago when an Arab oil embargo and revolution in Iran led to a rethinking of energy policy in the U.S. and Europe. But it is also different, he said.

“The crisis now is much worse than it was in the 70s,” said Bernard McNamee, a Republican former member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. “Everyone is looking around, and no one seems to know what to do.”

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HEADLINE	07/29 Gov. to rescind 12 emergency decrees
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3579689/inslee-to-rescind-12-emergency-decrees-related-to-covid-19/
GIST	<p>Gov. Jay Inslee announced on Friday that he will rescind 12 decrees under his COVID-19 emergency authority, saying they are no longer needed in response to the pandemic.</p> <p>The proclamations are related to certain health care facilities such as hospitals, long-term care facilities and health care professionals of which flexibility was made to statutes related to training, testing and the certification of various health care workers.</p> <p>The rescissions apply to proclamations 20-52, which incorporate several decrees, and eight others proclamations, which are separately listed.</p> <p>According to the state, while COVID-19 still persists and is easily spreadable, the measures the state has taken to save lives and reduce infections with the help of vaccines and other medicines have made a glidepath for licensed workers to return to normal compliance.</p> <p>For example, during the early stages of the pandemic, a decree was issued to prohibit all hospitals, ambulatory surgical facilities, dental orthodontic and endodontic offices in the state from providing most non-urgent procedures, but that changes with the recension.</p>

	<p>To assure health care providers and facilities have a fair amount of time to transition to pre-COVID laws, the rescission will take effect on Oct. 27, which is around 90 days.</p> <p>According to the governor's office, the Department of Health and the Department of Social and Health Services will provide technical help for all facilities to move into compliance.</p> <p>For added support, the state will provide approximately \$22 million to maintain contracted health care staff statewide and support patients transitioning to community-based services.</p> <p>According to a release from the governor's office, "Some of those funds will be used to support Harborview Medical Center in its efforts to secure community-based care for patients with complex medical and behavioral needs."</p> <p>Once the recessions take effect, 87% of all COVID emergency decrees issued in Washington will have been rescinded, according to the state.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Spain: monkeypox-related death
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/29/spain-reports-first-death-in-europe-related-to-monkeypox-outbreak
GIST	<p>Spain has reported what is thought to be Europe's first monkeypox-related death in the current outbreak of the disease.</p> <p>Brazil reported earlier on Friday the first monkeypox-related death outside Africa in the current wave.</p> <p>According to a World Health Organization report from 22 July, only five deaths had been reported worldwide, all in Africa.</p> <p>The WHO last Saturday declared the rapidly spreading outbreak a global health emergency, its highest level of alert.</p> <p>In its latest report, the Spanish health ministry said 4,298 cases had been confirmed in the country, only 64 of these were women.</p> <p>Of the 3,750 patients it had information on, it said 120 had been hospitalised and one had died.</p> <p>A spokesperson for Spain's health ministry declined to give further details on the deceased person.</p> <p>The Brazilian victim was a 41-year-old man who, according to the health ministry, also suffered from lymphoma and a weakened immune system.</p> <p>"The comorbidities aggravated his condition," the ministry said.</p> <p>It added that the patient was hospitalised in the southeastern city of Belo Horizonte and died from septic shock after being taken to the intensive care unit.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Anti-Iran protesters storm Iraq parliament
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/30/iraq-protesters-storm-parliament-again-baghdad-iran
GIST	<p>Hundreds of protesters have breached Iraq's parliament for a second time this week.</p> <p>The protesters, who are followers of an influential Shia cleric, are demonstrating against formation of the next government by Iran-backed parties.</p>

Iraqi security forces used teargas and sound bombs to try to repel the demonstrators. An expected parliament session did not take place and there were no lawmakers in the hall.

Iraq's prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, directed security forces to protect demonstrators and asked them to keep their protest peaceful.

Security forces hurled gas canisters and used sound bombs to disperse the thousands of Iraqi demonstrators, in the heavily fortified government zone of the capital.

Demonstrators used ropes to pull down cement barricades leading to the gate of Iraq's Green Zone, which houses official buildings and foreign embassies.

"We came today to remove the corrupt political class and prevent them from holding a parliament session, and to prevent the Framework from forming a government," said Raad Thabet, 41. "We responded to al-Sadr's call. We will go to the Green (Zone). No matter the cost."

The protesters are followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, who called for the demonstrations against the formation of the next government by Iran-backed political groups. Al-Sadr's party exited government formation talks in June, giving his rivals in the Coordination Framework alliance the majority they needed to move forward with the process.

Many protesters wore black to mark the days leading to Ashura, which commemorates the death of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and one of Shia Islam's most important figures. Al-Sadr's messaging to his followers has used the important day in Shia Islam to kindle protests.

Al-Sadr has used his large grassroots following as leverage against his rivals.

On Wednesday, hundreds of his followers [stormed the parliament building](#) after the Framework alliance named Mohammed al-Sudani as their nominee for the premiership and signalled their readiness to form a government despite his threats.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Vaccines scarce as monkeypox cases rise
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jul/30/us-monkeypox-vaccine-cases-rise
GIST	<p>or 67-year-old Peter Madero, getting a monkeypox vaccination from the Chelsea sexual health clinic in Manhattan on Friday was a matter of staying protected amid increasing cases of virus as it spreads across the country and world.</p> <p>But Madero admits that he was "one of the lucky ones", successfully securing a vaccine after a month of waiting.</p> <p>"Better to be safe than sorry," Madero said. "Problem is, it's hard to get it, and you have to go online, and then they only have so many."</p> <p>In New York, monkeypox is officially an imminent public health threat.</p> <p>More than a quarter of all monkeypox cases in the US – 1,341 – are from New York state, with the majority coming from New York City. Furthermore, the US leads the world in confirmed cases – nearly 5,000 as of Friday, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Many have been clamoring to get a scarce number of available vaccination appointments. But getting vaccinated has proven to be a confusing process even for those who are eligible – namely, men who have sex with men and have multiple partners.</p> <p>Daniel Enderle, 31, came to the clinic after hearing from a friend about available vaccine appointments.</p>

Enderle hoped to get a shot by walking in for an appointment, but was turned away and referred by staff to the city health department's online appointment portal.

Currently, anyone interested in getting the vaccine must go through the city's health department [website](#) and make an appointment.

While all appointments have been filled through July, those eligible and interested are encouraged to check the portal for availabilities that open up because of cancellations, [the New York Times](#) reported.

Close contacts of those who have monkeypox will be contacted separately and receive instructions on how to make a vaccine appointment.

Enderle admitted he had not gotten a chance to research the process, but he said he hopes that public health employees find other ways to make the vaccination process more accessible, including creating walk-in appointments.

"Get behind it before it affects too many people," Enderle said.

Michael Crawford, 57, said that while getting a vaccination appointment for monkeypox has not been as difficult for him, he has heard about the unreliable appointment process others are experiencing.

"My experience seems to be very simple," said Crawford, who had help making his appointment. "Everything I've seen in the media seems to be disastrous so I'm confused as to why there are two such starkly different experiences."

Complications around the vaccine rollout have also mirrored the stifled deployment of information on monkeypox as an illness.

To many, monkeypox has [largely been characterized](#) as a sexually transmitted illness that primarily affects LGBTQ+ communities, even though the illness can spread by people in close or intimate contact with someone else.

Enderle said that the characterization of monkeypox has brought on additional stigma.

"It's subtle, kind of like, 'Be careful when you hang out with the gays,'" he said.

Daniel Couri, who managed to get the vaccine, said the language used around monkeypox is similar to descriptors used during the HIV/Aids epidemic in the 1980s. "I don't want it to be labeled as a gay disease," he said.

Many believe that more needs to be done by public health officials to increase awareness of the illness and availability of vaccines, despite continued attention on the coronavirus pandemic.

"Get it together," Crawford said.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Day 157 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/30/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-157-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia and Ukraine have both launched criminal investigations into strikes that have reportedly killed at least 40 Ukrainian prisoners of war who were held at a pre-trial detention centre in the village of Olenivka, after both countries blamed the other side for the attack.• Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has accused Russia of a "petrifying war crime" over the killings and called on world leaders to "recognise Russia as a terrorist state".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine has said it is ready for grain exports to leave its ports again but is waiting for the go-ahead from the United Nations, which it hoped it would receive later on Friday. • Horrific video has emerged that appears to show a Russian soldier castrating a Ukrainian prisoner, who other reports suggest was subsequently murdered. The footage, reviewed by the Guardian, was originally posted on pro-Russian Telegram channels. Aric Toler at investigative outlet Bellingcat, suggested that the video – featuring a Russian soldier, wearing a distinctive black wide-brimmed hat, approaching another figure who has his hands bound and is lying face down with the back of his trousers cut away – appeared to be authentic . • At least five people have been killed and seven injured in a strike on a bus stop in the city of Mykolaiv, according to the regional governor, Vitaliy Kim. Graphic images from the scene show the street littered with bodies. • Vladimir Putin’s press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, said on Friday that Russia staunchly supported China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, after the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, warned the US president, Joe Biden, against “playing with fire” over Taiwan in a phone call on Thursday. • Germany’s economy minister said on Friday that putting the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline into operation was not an option as this would only play into the hands of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. There is growing anger in Germany over soaring energy prices. • Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov, a Russian operative who was subjected to US sanctions on Friday, has been charged with using political groups in the US to advance pro-Russia propaganda, including during the invasion of Ukraine earlier this year. • The US treasury department said on Friday it had imposed sanctions on another individual alongside Ionov, as well as on four entities that support the Kremlin’s global malign influence and election interference operations, including in the US and Ukraine. • Belarus recalled its UK ambassador on Friday in response to what it called “hostile and unfriendly” actions by London. • North Macedonia plans to donate an unspecified number of Soviet-era tanks to Ukraine as it seeks to modernise its own military to meet Nato standards, its defence ministry said on Friday. • Germany would deliver 16 Biber bridge-layer tanks to Ukrainian forces, the German defence ministry said. • A Ukrainian court on Friday reduced to 15 years a life sentence handed to a Russian soldier in May for pre-meditated murder in the country’s first war crimes trial. • A Russian ammunition depot in the southern Kherson region had been destroyed, Ukrainian officials said on Friday. • The UK defence minister, Ben Wallace, has said Russian forces in Ukraine are in “a very difficult spot”, and that Putin’s strategy was akin to putting his forces through a meat grinder. In his opinion, he said, Russia was “certainly not able to occupy the country. They may be able to carry on killing indiscriminately and destroying as they go, but that is not a victory.”
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HEADLINE	07/29 DHS failed to file 17% immigration cases
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/29/17-immigration-cases-tossed-because-dhs-failed-fil/
GIST	<p>Immigration judges are tossing one out of every six new immigration cases because Homeland Security failed to file a basic form — the original court summons — according to a new study.</p> <p>When illegal border jumpers are nabbed, Customs and Border Protection is supposed to issue the migrant a Notice to Appear, which is a summons for immigration court. CBP is then supposed to file the NTA with the immigration court itself.</p> <p>But CBP failed to file the form in nearly 17% of cases so far this fiscal year, according to data compiled by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University and released Friday.</p> <p>Analysts said it was a shocking bungle.</p>

“DHS needs to get its priorities in order to ensure cases are properly filed, that aliens are properly served and that the ICE attorney is ready to go forward in court on the hearing date,” said Andrew “Art” [Arthur](#), a former immigration judge and now a fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies. “This is indicative of a lack of interest on the part of the Biden administration in actually enforcing immigration laws.”

The Washington Times has reached out to CBP for comment.

The new TRAC report adds to a growing pile of evidence for how badly the Biden team has mishandled the record surge of illegal immigrants at the border.

The Times reported this week on tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who were caught and released without even an NTA being issued. Officers at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement were tasked this spring with tracking down some of them and serving them with the paperwork.

Out of more than 30,000 potential targets, roughly 600 were able to be served.

Officials have blamed the record numbers at the border for upsetting CBP’s processing. Issuing an NTA can take 90 minutes per person.

Once an NTA is issued, a migrant is entered into deportation proceedings and has an immigration court date scheduled. TRAC said CBP is required to upload the NTA into the court’s computer system before the first hearing.

That final step isn’t happening, TRAC said.

TRAC said it was previously exceedingly rare for an NTA not to be filed. In 2016, for example, just 11 cases out of 178,052 were dismissed because an NTA wasn’t filed.

That rose to about 1 in 40 cases in 2020. But the rate soared under the Biden administration, reaching more than 1 in 10 cases last year and now reaching 1 in 6 so far this fiscal year.

“This is exceedingly wasteful of the Court’s time. It is also problematic for the immigrant (and possibly their attorney) if they show up at hearings only to have the case dismissed by the Immigration Judge because the case hasn’t actually been filed with the Court,” TRAC said.

Mr. Arthur said if a case is dismissed for lack of an NTA, Homeland Security needs to re-serve the migrant with new paperwork with a new court date.

That requires the willingness — and ability — to locate and serve tens of thousands of people. TRAC identified more than 47,000 cases in the first nine months of the current fiscal year alone.

Mr. Arthur said he expects Congress and the Government Accountability Office to take an interest in the lapse.

“The only question that remains is whether this is nonfeasance or malfeasance,” he said.

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HEADLINE	07/29 Spokane Co. possible monkeypox case
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/monkeypox/monkeypox-case-reported-in-spokane/293-cfb6c1c6-f077-44a6-8b8a-b45ab67ca159
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) has reported a presumptive case of monkeypox virus infection in an adult in Spokane County.</p> <p>According to a press release, health officials are currently investigating the patient's case history, and the risk to the general public is considered low.</p>

SRHD says initial testing was completed at a commercial laboratory on July 29, 2022. Confirmatory testing will be done at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

According to SRHD, the patient is receiving outpatient care. The health district is conducting contact tracing to identify anyone who may be at risk due to direct, close contact with the infected patient. Those who were in close contact are asked to watch for symptoms of illness.

The need for a vaccine or antivirals is being evaluated on a case-by-case basis in consultation with CDC officials, SRHD says. While the CDC does not recommend broader use of the vaccine at this time, their evaluation of vaccine guidance is ongoing.

According to SRHD, the virus does not easily spread between people with casual contact. Transmission can occur through contact with infectious sores and bodily fluids, contaminated items, clothing or bedding, or through respiratory droplets associated with face-to-face contact.

"While the threat of monkeypox generally remains low, it's important that everyone be aware of this disease so that those at risk can seek medical care and get tested promptly if they believe they have symptoms," said Health Officer Dr. Francisco Velázquez.

Symptoms of monkeypox include the following, according to SRHD:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Rash that can look like pimples or blisters

The illness typically lasts two to four weeks, SRHD says. Most people recover on their own or without treatment. However, officials say monkeypox can cause scars from the sores, lead to pneumonia and, in rare cases, be fatal.

SRHD says people with monkeypox can spread the virus from when symptoms start until the rash has fully healed and a fresh layer of skin has formed.

According to SRHD, people can prevent the spread of monkeypox in the following ways:

- Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Minimize skin-to-skin contact with individuals who have been exposed to the virus or those showing a rash or skin sores
- Avoid contact with any materials, such as bedding or clothing, that have been in direct contact with someone with monkeypox
- Reach out to a health care provider if you develop symptoms, as early recognition and testing can help prevent further transmission

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HEADLINE	07/30 Homeless camping at highway rest areas
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/homeless-campers-to-face-new-enforcement-efforts-at-highway-rest-areas
GIST	<p>SMOKEY POINT, Wash. — The Washington State Patrol has a new plan to discourage homeless campers from taking over highway rest areas.</p> <p>A popular stop at Smokey Point on Interstate 5 had so many problems recently that state officials said they were forced to shut it down on July 18 because of concerns about people living in broken down cars and RVs at the site and causing damage to state buildings and property.</p> <p>That rest area reopened Friday under a new enforcement strategy drawn up by State Patrol troopers.</p>

Richard LeMieux said he uses the Smokey Point rest stop regularly while traveling.

Before troopers closed the area, LeMieux said a lot of the parking spaces were occupied by derelict and abandoned vehicles.

The State Patrol is looking to reduce the number of campers at rest stops.

"They wouldn't be moved," he said. "They wouldn't move for literally weeks."

State officials erected signs during the closure reminding people about parking limits at the site.

General travelers can stay up to eight hours in a 24-hour period while drivers of commercial vehicles are allowed to stay up to 11 hours.

Ron Robinson frequently travels the I-5 corridor and pulls into Smokey Point on occasion.

He said the closure has impacted truckers.

"When it's shut down, truckers are parked on the exits because they have limited time that they can drive and that's a problem," he said.

Smokey Point will also see increased patrols by troopers to make sure it remains a safe space.

In an emailed statement, Chris Loftis, a spokesperson for the State Patrol, said: "Our state's 47 Safety Rest Areas are provided and managed by WSDOT and are used by over 24 million travelers each year. They support the local economy and public safety by allowing tired truckers and the traveling public the space to rest and recharge before continuing to deliver goods and services or get to their desired destinations. Illegal and unsafe vehicular encampment often compromises those intended benefits by monopolizing limited parking space. In addition, illegal encampment has sometimes led to dangerous criminal behavior as well as significant sanitation challenges."

In addition to stepped up enforcement, the State Patrol said its troopers will also share contacts for government and non-profit groups who can provide resources to help the unhoused or those facing economic hardships.

If the new approach works at Smokey Point, the patrol and state transportation department say they may use it as a model to address problems at the other 46 rest areas located throughout Washington state.

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HEADLINE	07/29 Russia wants Victor Bout back badly; why?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/29/victor-bout-gru-sechin/
GIST	<p>At the U.S. penitentiary in Marion, Ill., in a special unit so restrictive that it has the nickname "Little Guantánamo," a broad-chested, mustachioed man nicknamed the "merchant of death," who speaks at least six languages, is serving a 25-year term after building a gun-smuggling empire that spanned the globe.</p> <p>His name is Viktor Bout. And his native Russia wants him home, badly. The big question: Why? Bout, 55, is the most notorious arms dealer of his time, accused of profiting off weapons that fueled conflict in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.</p> <p>This week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States had proposed to Russia "a substantial offer" to secure the release of two Americans being held in Moscow, WNBA star Brittney Griner and security consultant Paul Whelan. Russian officials have hinted they expect a prisoner swap.</p>

There is little doubt that Bout would be the top prize for Russian officials, who have protested his treatment since his 2008 arrest in Thailand after a Drug Enforcement Administration sting. Steve Zissou, Bout's New York-based lawyer, warned this month that "no Americans will be exchanged unless Viktor Bout is sent home."

What is less clear, however, is exactly why Russia cares so much about Bout. When CIA Director William J. Burns, at the Aspen Security Forum this month, was asked why Russia wants Bout, Burns responded: "That's a good question, because Viktor Bout's a creep."

Though Russia has complained that Bout was entrapped by the DEA, many U.S. officials and analysts believe that its anger is not linked to the merits of the case, but rather Bout's links to Russian military intelligence.

"It's clear that he had significant ties to Russian government circles," said Lee Wolensky, a National Security Council official in the Clinton administration who led early efforts to tackle Bout's network.

Though less famous than the KGB and its successor the FSB, Russia's military intelligence agency, commonly known as the GRU, has a reputation for taking bolder and riskier actions. It has been accused in recent years of everything from hacking elections to assassinating dissidents.

Additionally, reports suggest that Bout could have close ties to Igor Sechin, a former deputy prime minister of Russia and an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Both Sechin and Bout served with the Soviet military in Africa during the 1980s.

Bout has denied any such links to the GRU. He has also said he doesn't know Sechin.

But that silence could be the point. The arms trafficker refused to cooperate with U.S. authorities, even as he sat for over a decade, isolated and alone, in a cell thousands of miles from his home in Moscow. That silence could be rewarded.

"He kept his cool in prison, never exposed anything to the Americans, as far as I can tell," said Russian journalist Andrei Soldatov.

Simon Saradzhyan of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs said that Bout could never have operated such a large smuggling business without government protection, but that he never spoke about it. "The Russian government is eager to retrieve him so that it stays that way," Saradzhyan said.

Freeing Bout would send a message to others who could end up in trouble, said Mark Galeotti, an expert on Russian security: "The motherland will not forget you."

"The Russians successfully bringing [him] back would be regarded as a triumph," Galeotti said. "And let's face it, at the moment the Kremlin is looking for triumphs."

Russian political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya, the founder of the R.Politik political analysis group, said Putin wants something deeper than political gain. "We have a special word in the Russian language for people like Bout: 'svoi.' It means someone from 'us.' It's someone who worked for the motherland, at least in [the government's] eyes."

Bout, who has said in interviews that he was born in Tajikistan in 1967, studied languages at the Soviet Military Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow. He said he was pushed into studying Portuguese and later sent to Angola to work as a translator with the Soviet air force.

Military institutes were key recruitment grounds for the GRU (the more refined KGB, meanwhile, stuck to universities), experts say. And while his links to Sechin are unclear, both studied Portuguese and overlapped with the Soviet military in Mozambique.

Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bout, like many others who saw opportunity to profit amid chaos, became an entrepreneur. He used a small fleet of Soviet-made Antonov An-8 planes to set up an airfreight business and was apparently willing to take risks that others wouldn't, flying to war zones and failed states.

Bout is also believed to have access to something more valuable than planes: knowledge of the fate of the Soviet Union's enormous caches of weapons.

"He was moving out weapons for a decade, from places like Ukraine," said Douglas Farah, the president of the national security firm IBI Consultants and the [co-author of a book about Bout](#).

By 2000, Bout was one of the world's most notorious traffickers. He was dubbed "[the leading merchant of death](#)" in Britain's Parliament, and was named in U.N. reports for supplying heavy weaponry to a rebel movement in Angola as well as Liberia's Charles Taylor, then supporting a deadly civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

The extent to which Bout was working for Russian military interests is debated. Farah said he believed that given the scale of military equipment being moved, such work may have been tacitly approved by the GRU.

Wolensky said Bout came to the Clinton administration's attention because he was disrupting peace processes that the president was backing across Africa.

"In some cases, he was arming both sides of the conflict," Wolensky said.

Amid increasing international pressure, including an Interpol arrest warrant issued in 2004, Bout returned to Moscow.

By many accounts, Bout at that time stepped back from his most intense work in the arms trade. He lived in Golitsyno, a small town outside Moscow. A friend visiting his home in 2008 later noted that it was filled with books as well as, surprisingly, a DVD of the 2005 Nicolas Cage film "Lord of War," which was reportedly inspired by Bout's life.

Unfortunately for him, that guest — former South African intelligence agent Andrew Smulian — was working for the DEA.

Bout was arrested later in Thailand, where he had been secretly recorded by the DEA organizing the purchase of 100 surface-to-air missiles, 20,000 AK-47 rifles, 20,000 fragment grenades, 740 mortars, 350 sniper rifles, five tons of C-4 explosives and 10 million rounds of ammunition for people he thought were agents for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), an insurgent group.

The elaborate sting operation got around a key problem in the U.S. pursuit of Bout: He hadn't broken any U.S. laws. In 2011, a federal court in New York found him guilty of a variety of charges, including conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals.

Russian officials have complained particularly about the aggressive and unusual targeting of Bout.

But the recording of Bout helped make the broader argument that he wasn't a simple businessman. When the agents posing as buyers for the FARC said the weapons would be used against U.S. Air Force pilots working with the Colombian government, Bout could be heard telling them they had "the same enemy."

"It's not business," he said. "It's my fight."

HEADLINE	07/29 Tor fighting, beating Russian censorship
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2022/07/how-tor-is-fighting-and-beating-russian-censorship/
GIST	<p>For years, the anonymity service Tor has been the best way to stay private online and dodge web censorship. Much to the ire of governments and law enforcement agencies, Tor encrypts your web traffic and sends it through a chain of computers, making it very hard for people to track you online. Authoritarian governments see it as a particular threat to their longevity, and in recent months, Russia has stepped up its long-term ambition to block Tor—although not without a fight.</p> <p>In December 2021, Russia’s media regulator, Roskomnadzor, enacted a 4-year-old court order that allows it to order Internet service providers (ISPs) to block the Tor Project website, where the Tor Browser can be downloaded, and restrict access to its services. Since then, censors have been locked in a battle with Tor’s technical team and users in Russia, who are pushing to keep the Tor network online and allow people to access the uncensored web, which is otherwise heavily restricted in the country.</p> <p>Russia’s efforts to block Tor come in two flavors: the technical and the political. So far, Tor has had some success on both fronts. It has found ways to avoid Russian blocking efforts, and this month, it was removed from Russia’s list of blocked websites following a legal challenge. (Although this doesn’t mean blocking efforts will instantly end.)</p> <p>“We are being attacked by the Russian government, they are trying to block Tor,” says Gustavo Gus, community team lead of the Tor Project. The past few months have seen Russian officials adapt their tactics, Gus says, while the Tor Project’s anti-censorship engineers have successfully launched updates to stop its services from being blocked. “The fight is not over,” Gus says. “People can connect to Tor. People can easily bypass censorship.”</p> <p>In Russia, the Internet infrastructure is relatively decentralized: ISPs can receive blocking orders from Roskomnadzor, but it’s up to individual companies to implement them. (China is the only country to have effectively blocked Tor, which was possible due to more centralized Internet control). While Russian authorities have been installing new equipment that uses deep packet inspection to monitor and block online services, the effectiveness of these blocks is mixed.</p> <p>“The censorship that’s happening in Russia is not constant and uniform,” Gus says. Gus explains that because of different ISPs, Tor may be blocked for some people but not others, even those in the same city. Both Tor’s metrics and external analysis appear to show the dwindling effectiveness of Russian censorship.</p> <p>Tor’s data shows that since the end of 2021 there has been a big drop in the number of people directly connecting to Tor in Russia. However, people are able to connect to its services using volunteer-run bridges—entry points to the network that can’t easily be blocked, as their details aren’t public—and Tor’s anti-censorship tool Snowflake. External data from the Internet monitoring group Open Observatory of Network Interference shows a big rise in people in Russia accessing Tor using Snowflake.</p> <p>Since the start of Russia’s war with Ukraine in February, Russian officials have introduced a slurry of new laws to control the Internet and have clamped down on civil society groups. Natalia Krapiva, tech legal counsel at NGO Access Now, says Russia blocking Tor is part of larger efforts to control people’s access to information, such as the Kremlin’s VPN clampdown. “Russia is trying to eliminate any possible sources of truthful alternative information about the war and about what is going on in Russia internally,” Krapiva says. This feeds into a “chilling effect,” where people change their behavior or self-censor. “Certain measures, even if they don’t directly block or censor, create this fear of retaliation and fear of consequences coming later on.”</p> <p>There have been two major incidents against Tor’s Snowflake, Gus says. The first, in December, was fixed within 10 days. The second, in May of this year, was also patched shortly after it was discovered. “They</p>

were blocking Snowflake in different ways,” Gus says. These attacks against Snowflake often involve [fingerprinting](#), which uses small details about browsers and Internet connections to try to uniquely identify the technology that someone is using. For instance, the number of times a browser [connects with an external source](#) may make it stand out from other browsers. If Snowflake can be identified, it is easier to block.

Gus claims that some of the censorship efforts are being conducted by hand. “I have some evidence that they are doing that manually,” he says. Gus claims it is likely that some officials in Russia appear to be downloading Tor and then fetching bridges so they can then take steps to block access. “They try to simulate that they are a user so they can get the bridge address, and then they block it,” he says. Roskomnadzor, the Russian Internet regulator, had not replied to a request for comment at the time of publication.

The latest version of the Tor browser, [11.5](#), which was released last week, introduces new features to automatically try to help people circumvent censorship based on their location. In addition to [issuing updates to circumvent the way Tor is being blocked](#), the nonprofit technology organization has also been directly gathering information from people in Russia. Gus says it has introduced more support for Russian users, who can report back if they are being blocked. There are also [more volunteer-run bridges](#) that people in Russia can use to access Tor.

Gus also says that using Telegram to share details of Tor bridges has been effective in fighting blocks. “The bridges that they were blocking were not the same bridges that we were sharing with users,” Gus says, adding that Tor has plans to share bridges via Signal and WhatsApp in the future.

Tor is also working to stop the potential abuse of bridges. In 2016, researchers proposed a system [called Salmon](#) that aims to weed out those accessing bridge details with the intent of blocking or abusing them. Gus says the Tor team is working to turn this proposal into reality, and it would essentially assign “reliability” scores around the use of bridges. If someone requests a bridge and it ends up getting blocked, they may be considered less trustworthy. “If I give you another bridge and it gets blocked again, then you will get another bad score,” Gus says.

Russia’s efforts to block Tor aren’t just confined to within its own borders, though. In some areas of occupied Ukraine, such as the city of Kherson, [Ukrainian Internet connections are being rerouted through Russian networks](#), and that brings censorship and surveillance with it. Gus says that as this shift has started to happen—signaling a potential long-term occupation and “Russification” of the areas—people using Tor in Ukraine have reported it not working and websites not loading. “They are being affected by the same censorship that people in other places in Russia were reporting to us,” Gus says.

If people are able to access Tor—both in Russia and occupied Ukraine—they will be able to access news and information that isn’t controlled by the Russian government. Sarkis Darbinyan, head of legal practice of Russian digital rights group Roskomsvoboda, says more than 5,500 websites have been blocked in Russia since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February. “For getting access to truthful information for Russian users, it is now critical to have tools like VPN and Tor, which let people quickly and effectively restore their violated rights,” Darbinyan says.

Roskomsvoboda has been representing Tor in its legal cases against Russian authorities pro bono. So far it has successfully [overturned Roskomnadzor’s December decision](#) to block Tor—in part because of procedural issues. Although other related legal proceedings are ongoing, Darbinyan says Roskomsvoboda is seeking a “complete cancel” of the decision that Tor should be blocked.

Krapiva describes the court case against Tor as a “rare victory” for digital and human rights in Russia. However, she cautions that it is likely to be a “temporary” win and that Russian authorities may try to legally block Tor again. But this doesn’t mean it will be able to stop people from using Tor. “We’re still seeing that the technologies they have can be quite effective for blocking some things but are not 100 percent effective,” Krapiva says. “In practice, whether Tor will be fully blocked—I doubt it, to be honest. But legally, I think they will try again and might eventually succeed.”

HEADLINE	07/31 Gootkit loader resurfaces w/updated tactic
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/07/gootkit-loader-resurfaces-with-updated.html
GIST	<p>The operators of the Gootkit access-as-a-service (AaaS) malware have resurfaced with updated techniques to compromise unsuspecting victims.</p> <p>"In the past, Gootkit used freeware installers to mask malicious files; now it uses legal documents to trick users into downloading these files," Trend Micro researchers Buddy Tancio and Jed Valderama said in a write-up last week.</p> <p>The findings build on a previous report from eSentire, which disclosed in January of widespread attacks aimed at employees of accounting and law firms to deploy malware on infected systems.</p> <p>Gootkit is part of the proliferating underground ecosystem of access brokers, who are known to provide other malicious actors a pathway into corporate networks for a price, paving the way for actual damaging attacks such as ransomware.</p> <p>The loader utilizes malicious search engine results, a technique called SEO poisoning, to lure unsuspecting users into visiting compromised websites hosting malware-laced ZIP package files purportedly related to disclosure agreements for real estate transactions.</p> <p>"The combination of SEO poisoning and compromised legitimate websites can mask indicators of malicious activity that would usually keep users on their guard," the researchers pointed out.</p> <p>The ZIP file, for its part, includes a JavaScript file that loads a Cobalt Strike binary, a tool used for post-exploitation activities that run directly in the memory filelessly.</p> <p>"Gootkit is still active and improving its techniques," the researchers said. "This implies that this operation has proven effective, as other threat actors seem to continue using it."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Founder pro-Russia hacktivist Killnet quits?
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/founder-of-pro-russian-hacktivist-killnet-quitting-group
GIST	<p>The founder and leader of the crowdsourced pro-Russian hacktivists Killnet announced his plans to leave the group after an upcoming hack and leak operation against Lockheed Martin.</p> <p>Killnet is part of a new breed of cyberwarfare that emerged during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While less surgical and less successful than their opposition equivalent, the I.T. Army of Ukraine, both are civilian groups disrupting non-combat organizations to pressure adversarial nations. Killnet is best known for DDoS attacks against a Connecticut airport, institutions in Lithuania and Norway and the official website of the U.S. Congress, which it took down for around two hours.</p> <p>"Killnet has said in their statements on their Telegram channel and side channels the founder, KillMilk is moving on to protect the group, which I read as protecting them from law enforcement protection," said Bryce Webster-Jacobsen, director of intelligence operations at threat intel firm Groupsense. "I don't buy that explanation."</p> <p>The posts point Killnet members to new KillMilk channels where KillMilk claims to be starting a new group, so it does not appear that KillMilk is outright retiring. "Most likely," said Webster-Jacobsen, "This is an attempt to distance himself from international attention being paid to the group after the Lockheed operation — an attempt to distance themselves from the activity and C.Y.A., look out for yourself."</p> <p>While Killnet is mostly known for DDoS attacks, the Lockheed Martin operation will, the group publically said, be a hack and leak operation. Webster-Jacobsen has not been able to assess that the group has its</p>

initial access, but he notes that Killnet leadership are not typically as confident as they seem to be about their potential success without genuine belief they can back it up.

Killnet has announced its new leader will be "BlackSide."

"According to Killnet's official points of contact, BlackSide is the administrator of an unnamed cybercriminal special-access forum, which is allegedly hosted on the Tor network," said a private-sector analyst via email who asked to be kept anonymous to protect sourcing. "They have announced that BlackSide is skilled in ransomware, phishing, and theft from European cryptocurrency exchanges."

"'BlackSide'," that analyst said, "in the context of ransomware, is likely a tongue-in-cheek reference and portmanteau of the 'BlackMatter' and 'DarkSide' ransomware groups."

Because Killnet is crowdsourced from users of varying skill, experts believe there is a strong likelihood that the central strategy of DDoSes against perceived corporate and political infrastructure in nations aiding Ukraine. Killnet, said the analyst who asked to remain anonymous, very often claims responsibility for other groups attacks to create its own mythology. But, that analyst said, the expansive skillset Killnet claims BlackSide has could potentially mean new tactics for the group.

"We could see the integration of network intrusion, database exfiltration, and ransomware deployment tactics, techniques, and procedures into their operations. This is not out of the realm of possibility, as hacktivist and cybercriminal groups such as Network Battalion 65, Anonymous, XakNet, and others have been observed conducting similar activities," that analyst said.

"It is important to note that ransomware deployment is a complicated, multi-step, and time-consuming process. Due to Killnet's affinity for quick wins, it is unlikely that potential ransomware operations will be publicly discussed."

KillMilk is actively recruiting for his new venture.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Facebook ads push Android malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/facebook-ads-push-android-adware-with-7-million-installs-on-google-play/
GIST	<p>Several adware apps promoted aggressively on Facebook as system cleaners and optimizers for Android devices are counting millions of installations on Google Play store.</p> <p>The apps lack all of the promised functionality and push advertisements while trying to last as long as possible on the device.</p> <p>To evade deletion, the apps hide on the victim's device by constantly changing icons and names, masquerading as Settings or the Play Store itself.</p> <p>The adware apps abuse the Contact Provider Android component, which enables them to transfer data between the device and online services.</p> <p>The subsystem is called every time a new app is installed, so the adware might be using it to initiate the ad-serving process. To the user it may look like the ads are pushed by the legitimate app they installed.</p> <p>Researchers at McAfee discovered the adware apps. They note that users don't have to launch them after installation to see the ads because the adware initiates itself automatically without any interaction.</p> <p>The first action from these annoying apps is to create a permanent service for displaying the advertisements. If the process is "killed" (terminated), it re-launches immediately.</p>

Millions of downloads on Google Play

As McAfee comments in the report, users are convinced to trust the adware apps because they see a Play Store link on Facebook, leaving little margin for doubt.

This has resulted in unusually high download numbers for the particular type of applications, as shown in the list below:

1. **Junk Cleaner**, cn.junk.clean.plp, 1M+ downloads
2. **EasyCleaner**, com.easy.clean.ipz, 100K+ downloads
3. **Power Doctor**, com.power.doctor.mnb, 500K+ downloads
4. **Super Clean**, com.super.clean.zaz, 500K+ downloads
5. **Full Clean** -Clean Cache, org.stemp.fl.clean, 1M+ downloads
6. **Fingertip Cleaner**, com.fingertip.clean.cvb, 500K+ downloads
7. **Quick Cleaner**, org.qck.cle.oyo, 1M+ downloads
8. **Keep Clean**, org.clean.sys.lunch, 1M+ downloads
9. **Windy Clean**, in.phone.clean.www, 500K+ downloads
10. **Carpet Clean**, og.crp.cln.zda, 100K+ downloads
11. **Cool Clean**, syn.clean.cool.zbc, 500K+ downloads
12. **Strong Clean**, in.memory.sys.clean, 500K+ downloads
13. **Meteor Clean**, org.ssl.wind.clean, 100K+ downloads

Most affected users are based in South Korea, Japan, and Brazil, but the adware has unfortunately reached users worldwide.

The adware apps are no longer available on the Play Store. However, users that installed them have to remove them manually from the device.

System cleaners and optimizers are popular software categories despite the low benefits they provide. Cybercriminals know that a large number of users would try such solutions to prolong the life of their devices and often guise malicious apps as such.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Fake investment network targets Europe
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/huge-network-of-11-000-fake-investment-sites-targets-europe/
GIST	<p>Researchers have uncovered a gigantic network of more than 11,000 domains used to promote numerous fake investment schemes to users in Europe.</p> <p>The platforms show fabricated evidence of enrichment and falsified celebrity endorsements to create an image of legitimacy and lure in a larger number of victims.</p> <p>The goal of the operation is to trick users into an opportunity for high-return investments and convince them to deposit a minimum amount of 250 EUR (\$255) to sign up for the fake services.</p> <p>Researchers at cybersecurity company Group-IB discovered the operation and mapped the massive network of phishing sites, content hosts, and redirections.</p> <p>According to Group-IB, more than 5,000 of the identified malicious domains are still active.</p> <p>Currently, the countries targeted in this scheme are the UK, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Norway, Sweden, and the Czech Republic.</p> <p>Scamming process</p> <p>The fraudsters put an effort into promoting the campaigns on various social media platforms or use compromised Facebook and YouTube to reach as many users as possible.</p>

	<p>Victims that fall for the trick and click on the ads to learn more are redirected to landing pages showing alleged success stories.</p> <p>The fraudsters then request contact details. A "customer agent" from a call center reaches out to the victim and provides the investment terms and conditions in an elaborate social engineering scam.</p> <p>Eventually, the victim is convinced to deposit 250 EUR or more, while the details provided on the fake site are stored and used for future campaigns or resold on the dark web.</p> <p>Once the victim deposits the funds, they get access to a fake investment dashboard that supposedly lets them track daily gains.</p> <p>This is to prolong illusion of a legitimate investment and entice victims to deposit more money for larger profits.</p> <p>The scam is revealed when the victim tries to withdraw money from the platform but not before asking for a final payment.</p> <p>Investments are never guaranteed to come without a risk, so promises of sure profit should be seen as red flags.</p> <p>Also, real investment platforms don't offer personal account managers for small investments.</p> <p>When an investment platform grabs your attention, it is advisable to make sure that it's from an established broker. Looking for reviews from other users and analyzing multiple comments for a pattern may also reveal the fraud. Many times, scammers don't make an effort to mimic a real user's opinion and publish variations of the same text.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 SKorea companies move to metaverse
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/south-korean-companies-move-greener-affordable-metaverse-office/story?id=87624178
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- A unicorn start-up company based in South Korea is offering office spaces for rent for companies wanting to go completely paperless and relocate to a more sustainable and affordable space—the metaverse.</p> <p>Zigbang launched the virtual office program ‘Soma’ in May. Inside this metaverse known as the ‘Soma World’ stands the main building for working, a convention center that can accommodate up to 3,000 people, a networking hub, and the Zigbang headquarters. As the physical restraints of an offline workspace are gone, employees who work for an office inside the Soma can log in from any city or country with an internet connection.</p> <p>“[Working inside Soma] is basically like meeting in the real world, but actually virtual. So there's the convenience of being far apart but still being together,” David Kim, Business development manager of Soma, told ABC News.</p> <p>More than 2,000 people work inside the PropTech Tower, a 30-story building leased to 20 global and domestic companies. Users can work in their office with their colleagues, spend time in a shared lounge to network with other companies, or even take a virtual stroll by the deck.</p> <p>Zigbang is not the only company investing in the futuristic working environment. Tech giants Meta and Microsoft are working on future workspaces using Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technology. Online world pioneers like Teamflow and Gather also provide a means of work calls and work discussions in the virtual space.</p>

But Zigbang says Soma has an edge on the rivals by offering the most realistic office setting possible for its users. While getting rid of the physical restraints of commuting to work, Soma offers a working environment that makes everyone feel engaged. Avatars would have their walk to office spaces rather than jumping from room to room with a single click. Instead of sending instant chats, employees casually talk to each other with their own voices as they would in an actual office.

“Soma also has great strength in ESG management, a recent global issue. It can greatly help protect the environment by implementing a paperless working environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from commuting,” Sunwoong Lyuh, Zigbang's Vice President, explained to ABC News.

Zigbang, sponsored and partially funded by South Korea’s Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Startups, has also become an example as part of the government's initiative to support beginning enterprises to meet ESG goals set by the United Nations.

“A company based in the metaverse dramatically reduces the carbon footprint of a workplace that may include everything from transportation used during the commute to work to office supplies like pen and paper in everyday office life,” the Ministry of Environment’s global media spokesperson Minjo Chun told ABC News.

As of now, companies that are based inside Soma are not obliged to pay rent or maintenance fees to Zigbang.

“Soma is not charging any rent to the companies leasing space inside the Soma world,” Lyuh told ABC News. “Our focus is on providing the new working experience of ‘face-to-face remote work’ to as many companies as possible.”

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HEADLINE	07/29 Commercial satellite boom: space targets
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/the-commercial-satellite-boom-is-leaving-space-vulnerable-to-hackers/
GIST	<p>Humanity’s imagination turned toward the heavens this month as the James Webb Space Telescope revealed images of distant galaxies.</p> <p>But John Crassidis, who worked on initial designs for the telescope at NASA during the 1990s, is focused on something closer to home: securing the thousands of human-made satellites orbiting the Earth — many of which are now controlled by the private sector. And Crassidis, now the director of the Center for Space Cyber Strategy and Cyber Security at the University of Buffalo, is waiting for one of them to be wiped out by a cyberattack.</p> <p>“I don’t think it’s a question of if, I think it’s a question of when,” he told The Record.</p> <p>He’s not the only one who is worried: U.S. lawmakers and other researchers are seeking solutions for securing our increasingly crowded skies.</p> <p>“We need to make every effort to understand what further actions can be and should be taken to strengthen cybersecurity for civil and commercial space systems, including commercial space systems that provide mission-critical government data and services,” said Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics Chairman Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) in a Thursday hearing.</p> <p>As more nations and private entities have the capacity to launch spacecraft into orbit, the number of satellites surrounding the earth has skyrocketed up to 7,895, according to data from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.</p> <p>Many are private communications satellites now being used to provide internet access that can be a lifeline to isolated areas or when local infrastructure is disrupted in conflict.</p>

However, those lifelines can still be vulnerable to cyberattacks — a problem highlighted by a cyberattack that disrupted satellite internet provider Viasat during the invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. and European allies [attributed](#) that attack to Russia.

“For commercial vendors, they are driven by the consumers of the services that are being used — so they may not be as willing to pay for security as a [Defense Department] or civil agency would because they are required to do so,” Theresa Suloway, Space Cybersecurity Engineer at MITRE Corporation, testified.

But even while some U.S. agencies work to provide guidance for how to secure commercial satellites, many remain vulnerable to attacks that could interfere with communications capabilities on Earth or put them on a crash course with other space objects.

Such an attack could have long-term consequences for humanity’s navigation of local space.

“A collision between satellites would not only destroy the satellites involved, but the resulting debris would permanently remove that orbit or region from use by any other satellite,” said Suloway. “This risk requires pre-emptive rather than reactive action.”

Even without such attacks, space is already getting crowded with debris. NASA reported last year that it’s tracking [more than 27,000](#) pieces of space junk that are already [creating challenges for spaceflight](#) and likely to cascade — a pollution problem known as “Kessler Syndrome” after NASA scientist Donald Kessler who raised concerns about the risks in the 1970s.

The final frontier for cybersecurity

Protecting a satellite involves securing both the object in orbit as well as the ground control station used to communicate with it. The ground stations are generally easier targets for digital attackers, but both can be vulnerable, Suloway testified to the space and aeronautics subcommittee.

For example, satellites rely on solar panels that must be carefully positioned to stay powered — so losing control of the systems that angle them may cause them to be knocked permanently offline in a matter of days, according to Crassidis.

“It doesn’t take too much to hack into a satellite, turn it — and if we can’t get control back, it’s dead,” he said. “The power is very limited on satellites.”

Cyberattacks on satellites are thought to be rare, but they’ve happened before.

For example, Beyer noted in his opening remarks that the U.S.-China Economic Security and Review Commission previously [reported](#) on hacks targeting U.S. government satellites, including an incident where a cyberattacker “achieved all steps required to command [a NASA earth observation satellite], but did not issue commands.”

Crassidis is especially concerned that channels used to transmit commands to commercial satellites may be known and open.

“The communication bands are pretty standard bands,” Crassidis said.

In her testimony Thursday, Suloway said securing those channels is an important step towards protecting the commercial space sector — including with encryption modules that are able to be upgraded to [quantum algorithms](#).

“Adding encryption to the groundspace link would mitigate some of the vulnerabilities by making it harder for malicious sources to send commands to the satellites,” she said.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [previously considered](#) including encryption requirements as part of regulations related to commercial spacecraft in 2020, but didn’t.

“It’s a big concern and the FCC keeps punting,” said Crassidis.

But it’s not the only concern about digitally securing satellites.

“Monitoring and situational awareness need to be built in now as part of the fabric of commercial space,” Suloway said, including best practices for digitally securing ground stations as well as satellites.

Developing guides that can lower the entry for using commercially available cybersecurity products can help the commercial space sector improve security without forcing them to do their own experimentation, she added.

Suloway testified in favor of incentivizing commercial sector information-sharing through voluntary collaborations, rather than regulatory approaches to getting the private sector on board — in part, she said, out of concerns that commercial space companies would choose to launch from other parts of the world where they did not have to comply. This might risk the U.S. losing out on a slice of a market that the Space Foundation [reports](#) attracted \$224 billion in revenue last year.

Much of the U.S. government’s recent policy moves follow this public-private partnership approach. In 2020, the Trump administration issued [Space Policy Directive-5](#), which ordered U.S. government agencies to “further define best practices, establish cybersecurity informed norms, and promote improved cybersecurity behaviors throughout the Nation’s industrial base for space systems.”

The next year, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [announced](#) the creation of a Space Systems Critical Infrastructure Working Group and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) [issued](#) the first draft of new cybersecurity guidance for commercial satellite operators.

Following the Viasat attack, CISA and the FBI issued [an advisory](#), while the National Security Agency issued [new guidance](#) on protecting satellite internet systems and lawmakers [introduced legislation](#) about studying how to prevent such attacks.

However, these efforts represent best practices — not rules that the government can compel companies to follow. And with more satellites going up every year, the threat of attacks is only on the rise.

“Right now in space, it’s the wild, wild west – it’s kind of scary when you think about it,” Crassidis said.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Raspberry Robin link to Russian Evil Corp
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/microsoft-ties-novel-raspberry-robin-malware-to-evil-corp-cybercrime-syndicate/
GIST	<p>Microsoft’s security team published evidence this week tying the Raspberry Robin malware to Russian cybercrime syndicate Evil Corp.</p> <p>In an update to a May report on the ransomware-as-a-service industry, Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) said some existing Raspberry Robin infections are being used to deploy FakeUpdates, a malware downloader in activity suspected to be linked to Evil Corp.</p> <p>Raspberry Robin was discovered in September 2021 by researchers from cybersecurity company Red Canary, which coined the name for the cluster of activity they were seeing.</p> <p>The activity involved a worm that is often installed through USB drives and relies on msixexec.exe to call out to its infrastructure, which Red Canary said is often connected to compromised QNAP devices.</p> <p>Microsoft said its researchers discovered that the FakeUpdates malware was being delivered via existing Raspberry Robin infections on July 26.</p>

“The DEV-0206-associated FakeUpdates activity on affected systems has since led to follow-on actions resembling DEV-0243 pre-ransomware behavior.”

Microsoft refers to Evil Corp as DEV-0243 and DEV-0206 is an unnamed access broker identified by the company.

BleepingComputer [reported earlier this month](#) that Microsoft sent a private threat intelligence advisory to Microsoft Defender for Endpoint subscribers that the Raspberry Robin worm was found on Windows devices within networks at hundreds of organizations in dozens of industries.

Cybersecurity company Sekoia [released its own report](#) confirming that it found Raspberry Robin on QNAP NAS devices. In Red Canary’s initial report on Raspberry Robin, they found that it was targeted at organizations with ties to technology and manufacturing.

Katie Nickels, director of intelligence at Red Canary, told The Record that Microsoft’s finding, if accurate, has filled a “major gap” with Raspberry Robin because no one had previously discovered any later-stage activity or found evidence linking it with any person or entity.

“Many organizations have observed and publicly discussed Raspberry Robin’s initial execution behaviors, but there remained a major gap in that no one seems to have observed any later-stage activity—like an eventual payload,” Nickels said.

“Microsoft’s finding that Raspberry Robin has deployed malware called FakeUpdates/SocGholish is an interesting development. Microsoft is certainly credible, but we can’t independently verify their claim at this time.”

Nickels added that it continues to see activity from Raspberry Robin but has not been able to associate it with any specific person, company, entity, or country, noting that it’s “too early to say if Evil Corp is responsible for, or associated with, Raspberry Robin.”

She explained that the ransomware-as-a-service ecosystem is complex and different criminal groups often partner with one another to achieve a variety of objectives, making it difficult to work out relationships between malware families and observed activity.

“Microsoft’s findings suggest that the adversaries behind Raspberry Robin may have some kind of relationship with DEV-0206 and DEV-0243, two groups tracked by Microsoft, but the exact nature of that relationship is unclear,” she said.

According to Nickels, Red Canary has not directly observed Raspberry Robin spreading FakeUpdates and is not aware of any clear connection to Evil Corp, DEV-0206, or DEV-0243.

“But we’re watching to see if more evidence emerges to solidify these relationships or if they were simply one-time occurrences,” she said.

Félix Aimé, a member of the threat intelligence team at Sekoia, [noted](#) that the main issue with Raspberry Robin revolves around the fact that thousands of infected USB devices are out in the wild and can “download arbitrary payloads from dozen of domain names that can be easily hijacked or re-purposed by malicious actors.”

Evil Corp is known for its connections to multiple ransomware groups – including Bitpaymer, DopplePaymer, WastedLocker and Clop – as well as other cybercrime activity. It was [sanctioned by the US Treasury Department](#) in December 2019.

In Microsoft’s report this week, the company noted that Evil Corp has begun to deploy the LockBit 2.0 RaaS payload during attacks “likely an attempt...to avoid attribution to their group, which could discourage payment due to their sanctioned status.”

HEADLINE	07/29 Data breach impacts 30+ healthcare firms
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/onetouchpoint-discloses-data-breach-impacting-over-30-healthcare-firms?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Mailing and printing services vendor OneTouchPoint has disclosed a data breach impacting more than 30 healthcare providers and health insurance carriers.</p> <p>Headquartered in Hartland, Wisconsin, OneTouchPoint offers print, marketing execution and supply chain management services to organizations in the healthcare sector.</p> <p>The company revealed this week that it recently fell victim to a ransomware attack that has resulted in the compromise of personally identifiable information (PII) stored on its systems.</p> <p>OneTouchPoint says it found encrypted files on some of its systems on April 28 and immediately started investigating the incident. It later discovered that the attackers had accessed its network on April 27, but could not determine which files the attackers had accessed within its network.</p> <p>The company says it later determined that the compromised systems contained PII provided by its customers, including names, addresses, birth dates, date of service, description of service, diagnosis codes, information provided as part of a health assessment, and member ID.</p> <p>For one customer, Social Security numbers were also included in the compromised information.</p> <p>OneTouchPoint also notes that it has been working with its customers to identify the individuals whose information might have been impacted and that it has started sending out data breach notifications on behalf of impacted customers.</p> <p>In a data breach notice on its website, OneTouchPoint lists 34 healthcare insurance carriers and healthcare services providers that have been impacted, but the number appears to be larger.</p> <p>At least two other entities – Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield and Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan – have sent data breach notifications after learning that their subcontractor, Matrix Medical Network, was impacted by the OneTouchPoint ransomware attack.</p> <p>It is yet unclear how many individuals might have been impacted in the incident.</p> <p>OneTouchPoint hasn't shared information on the type of ransomware that was used in the attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Phishing attack uses countdown clock
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/this-phishing-attack-uses-a-countdown-clock-to-panic-you-into-handing-over-passwords/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A sneaky new phishing attack attempts to manipulate victims into entering their username and password by claiming their account will be deleted if they don't - and it uses a countdown timer to pile on the pressure.</p> <p>Detailed by cybersecurity researchers at Cofense, this phishing attack begins with a message which claims to warn the recipient that an attempt to login to their account from a location they haven't used before has been blocked – and that they should click a link to verify their email address.</p> <p>This kind of fear tactic is common in phishing attacks, as cyber criminals know that sending victims into a state of urgency means they're more likely to follow instructions, particularly if they've been told something is wrong with their account.</p>

What sets this attack apart from others is that it appears to borrow a tactic from [ransomware gangs](#) – displaying a countdown clock on the phishing site. The timer ticks down from an hour, claiming the user must enter their username and password to 'validate' their account before the countdown clock hits zero, otherwise their account – and even those of others – will be deleted.

This isn't a real warning and even if the countdown timer reaches zero, nothing will be deleted – but the tactic is designed to make the victim panic and follow the instructions. It's similar to a technique used by ransomware groups.

If the user targeted by the phishing email enters their login credentials, it either claims they've used the wrong password or it says the login details are accepted, before redirecting them back to their company home page. In either cases, the result is the same – the attacker steals the username and password.

There's several ways attackers could abuse legitimate login credentials. They could use them to access the network themselves to steal data, help gain access to other accounts or even plant [ransomware](#) or other [malware](#). Alternatively, they could [sell the stolen passwords to other cyber criminals](#) to use in their own illicit campaigns.

Phishing attacks are one of the most common methods cyber criminals use to steal usernames and passwords. Using [multi-factor authentication](#) (MFA) can help protect accounts, because even if the attacker knows the correct login credentials, the need for extra verification prevents them from being able to access the account, as well as providing a warning that something could be wrong.

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HEADLINE	07/29 FCC: escalating SMS phishing attacks
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-govt-warns-americans-of-escalating-sms-phishing-attacks/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) warned Americans of an increasing wave of SMS (Short Message Service) phishing attacks attempting to steal their personal information and money.</p> <p>Such attacks are also known as smishing or robotexts (as the FCC calls them), and scammers behind them may use various lures to trick you into handing over confidential information.</p> <p>"The FCC tracks consumer complaints – rather than call or text volume – and complaints about unwanted text messages have risen steadily in recent years from approximately 5,700 in 2019, 14,000 in 2020, 15,300 in 2021, to 8,500 through June 30, 2022," the US communications watchdog's Robocall Response Team said [PDF].</p> <p>"In addition, some independent reports estimate billions of robotexts each month – for example, RoboKiller estimates consumers received over 12 billion robotexts in June."</p> <p>False-but-believable smishing baits reported by American consumers to the FCC include claims about unpaid bills, package delivery issues, bank account problems, or law enforcement actions.</p> <p>Some of the most devious and convincing lures used in text message phishing attacks are links redirecting the targets to landing pages impersonating bank websites and asking them to verify a purchase or unlock frozen credit cards.</p> <p>Phishing text messages can also be spoofed to make it appear that the sends is someone you're more likely to trust, such as a government agency like the IRS or companies you may be familiar with.</p> <p>While some attackers will attempt to steal payment details, others are not as picky and will be happy to steal any personal information they can get their hands on, use in subsequent scams, or sell to other malicious actors.</p>

	<p>To defend against SMS phishing attacks, FCC recommends taking the following measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not respond to texts from unknown numbers or any others that appear suspicious. • Never share sensitive personal or financial information by text. • Be on the lookout for misspellings or texts that originate with an email address. • Think twice before clicking any links in a text message. If a friend sends you a text with a suspicious link that seems out of character, call them to ensure they weren't hacked. • If a business sends you a text you weren't expecting, look up their number online and call them back. • Remember that government agencies almost never initiate contact by phone or text. • Report texting scam attempts to your wireless service provider by forwarding unwanted texts to 7726 (or "SPAM"). • File a complaint with the FCC. <p>"If you think you're the victim of a texting scam, report it immediately to your local law enforcement agency and notify your wireless service provider and financial institutions where you have accounts," the FCC added.</p> <p>"For more information about scam calls and texts, visit the FCC Consumer Help Center and the FCC Scam Glossary."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Australia teen's sophisticated RAT spyware
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/30/brisbane-teenager-built-spyware-used-by-domestic-violence-perpetrators-across-world-police-allege
GIST	<p>Police allege that a teenager living in the suburbs of Brisbane created and sold a sophisticated hacking tool used by domestic violence perpetrators and child sex offenders to spy on tens of thousands of people across the globe – and then used the proceeds to buy takeaway food.</p> <p>Jacob Wayne John Keen, now 24, was 15 years old and living in his mother's rental when he allegedly created a sophisticated spyware tool known as a remote access trojan (RAT) that allowed users to remotely take control of their victims' computers.</p> <p>Called Imminent Monitor, once installed it could be used to steal victims' personal information, spy on them via webcams and microphones and track what they typed into emails or documents.</p> <p>Keen allegedly sold the tool for \$35 on a hacking forum, making between \$300,000 and \$400,000 by selling it to more than 14,500 people in 128 countries.</p> <p>Among them were domestic violence perpetrators and other criminals, according to a statement issued by the Australian federal police. The AFP said on Saturday it had confirmed 201 Australians had bought the spyware.</p> <p>Of those, the agency said, a "statistically high" proportion were named as respondents on domestic violence orders. The agency asserts that one buyer was on the child sex offenders register.</p> <p>The AFP said it believed there were tens of thousands of victims globally, including 44 in Australia. It said investigations into potential suspects who may have used the device were ongoing.</p> <p>According to the agency, a financial analysis had discovered that most of the money raised from allegedly selling the spyware was used to pay for food delivery services "and other consumable and disposable items".</p> <p>Keen was slapped with six charges earlier in July, and is due to appear at Brisbane's magistrates court next month. His mother, 42, has also been charged with allegedly dealing in the proceeds of crime.</p>

The pair had been due to appear in Brisbane’s magistrates court on Friday, but the case was laid over until next month.

The arrest was announced on Saturday following a coordinated global policing sting dating back to 2017.

Dubbed Operation Cepheus, it began when the AFP received information from cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks and the FBI about a suspicious malware.

A global investigation involving more than a dozen law enforcement agencies across Europe led to 85 search warrants being executed around the world, with 434 devices seized and 13 people arrested for using the malware for “alleged criminality”.

By 2019 the tool had been shut down, but after receiving evidence from overseas law enforcement, the AFP arrested Keen.

“The AFP-led investigation executed two search warrants in 2019 at the man’s then home in Brisbane,” the agency said in a statement. “Investigators seized a number of devices, including a custom-built computer containing code consistent with the development and use of the RAT.”

The AFP commander of cybercrime operations, Chris Goldsmid, said the operation provided a real example of how dangerous tech-enabled crime could be.

“These types of malware are so nefarious because it can provide an offender virtual access to a victim’s bedroom or home without their knowledge,” he said.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	07/31 NY sick 9/11 first responders to lose jobs?
SOURCE	https://nypost.com/2022/07/31/sick-9-11-first-responders-on-brink-of-losing-jobs-despite-law/
GIST	<p>When Bronx EMT Vanessa Rodriguez spent close to a year collecting body parts at Ground Zero in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, she never realized the toxic dust she inhaled would later give her stage-three cancer.</p> <p>Two decades later, the now-disabled mother of two is facing termination from the FDNY and preparing to apply for welfare after she learned the “unlimited” sick leave she thought she was entitled to under a 2019 state bill is not unlimited after all, despite what politicians promised.</p> <p>“I thought that the city would take care of us,” Rodriguez, who lost her job in May, told The Post during a recent interview.</p> <p>“I feel left out, like, ‘Here you go. You did your job. Now get out.’ It’s just so unfair the way they are handling things.”</p> <p>Rodriguez, 47, is one of a half-dozen or so FDNY EMS members who learned this summer they’ll be fired for being out sick for more than year with 9/11-related injuries under the state’s “unlimited” sick leave law for public workers who responded to the terrorist attack.</p> <p>When the FDNY informed the workers they’ll be canned if they don’t come back to work, many of them were in the midst of lengthy legal battles with the New York City Employee Retirement System, or NYCERS, to obtain an early “three-quarters” disability pension.</p>

But the applications have been denied, some repeatedly, and experts say the court battles can last for years for FDNY EMS members, [leaving them trapped in a bureaucratic limbo](#) between sick leave and retirement that wreaks financial ruin on their lives.

“The World Trade Center population has always been looked on as a very, very cherished group of individuals,” said Gary Smiley, the World Trade Center liaison for Local 2507, the paramedics and fire inspectors union.

“I don’t understand why you want to hurt these folks more than they’ve already been hurt. They responded to what they thought was a plane crash, but which turned into a nightmare that 21 years later continues to be a nightmare. Why do you want to add to these folks’ nightmare by not protecting them?”

As many as 200 EMS personnel who responded to the terror attacks and are either still working or on temporary leave with 9/11-related injuries could soon find themselves on the chopping block as well, said Smiley.

“You have the potential of causing over 200 people to be financially destitute,” said Smiley.

“I’m afraid this is going to turn into a tragedy.”

A legal gray area

The unlimited sick leave law, signed by former Gov. Andrew Cuomo on the 18th anniversary of 9/11, granted various city employees who were injured responding to the attack the same unlimited policy their uniformed counterparts at the NYPD and FDNY were entitled to.

Vanessa Rodriguez is preparing to apply for welfare after she learned the “unlimited” sick leave she thought she was entitled to under a 2019 state bill is not unlimited after all. Hans Pennink State Sen. Andrew Gounardes (D-Brooklyn), one of the bill’s sponsors, [celebrated the law as the end to “heartbreaking health struggles”](#) and endless negotiations for health benefits the responders sorely needed after developing a range of deadly illnesses from their time on the pile.

But the FDNY and the city’s Law Department claimed the legislation doesn’t actually guarantee “unlimited” sick time. They said Article 71 of the state’s civil service law, which allows agencies to fire workers who’ve been out with job-related disabilities for more than a year, supersedes the state bill.

The FDNY said it would be ludicrous to expect any public agency to indefinitely pay an employee that isn’t working for years on end, regardless if the injuries are 9/11 related or not.

The agency noted the EMS personnel facing termination have been out sick for well over a year and blamed NYCERS for denying the workers their early retirements and forcing them to wage costly legal battles despite their career-ending disabilities.

“We have been advised that each of these members applied for a disability pension through NYCERS (New York City Employee Retirement System) and were denied.

“If these members wanted to return to work, they could return to our Bureau of Health Services tomorrow and begin the process of being reinstated, and offered a reasonable accommodation,” an FDNY spokesperson said in a statement.

“We have explored as many options as possible to keep these members on our payroll. We have made numerous attempts to avoid separation, and have exhausted all of our options.”

During a recent interview, Gounardes said he wasn’t sure if Article 71 supersedes the bill he sponsored, calling it “a little bit of a wrinkle,” but said the FDNY’s decision to move ahead with termination is “shameful” and “inconsistent with the spirit of the law.”

“Unlimited sick leave is unlimited sick leave, and that intent was really clear,” said Gounardes.

“The workers should not be penalized because it takes a year-plus to get their disability review completed. That’s not the worker’s fault, that’s the pension system’s fault. Shame on whoever the mid-level paper pusher is who’s doing this.”

Smiley insisted the FDNY and Law Department’s argument that Article 71 supersedes the state bill is a legal gray area that’s yet to be argued before a judge.

“Nowhere in the [unlimited sick leave] bill does it state that it’s other than unlimited. Nowhere does it state that after one year’s time, you’re terminated,” said Smiley.

“Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been called the unlimited sick leave bill. It would have been called the World Trade Center one-year bill.”

‘I really feel betrayed’

Tim McEnaney, who runs a law firm specializing in New York’s three-quarters disability pension, said EMS members see “disproportionately negative results” when applying for an early retirement from NYCERS compared to “any other uniformed service in the city.”

“You have to have metastasizing cancer or a leg off or missing an arm, or something so irrefutably disabling that [NYCERS] would be a complete laughingstock to the world [for denying the application]. Other than that, you’re getting denied,” said McEnaney, whose law firm Goldberg & McEnaney represents two of the EMS members interviewed by The Post.

“And let’s say you don’t have an attorney. If you don’t have an attorney, they don’t even look twice at your application. It’s denied.”

Rodriguez, the Bronx EMT, knows that struggle all too well. Since 2014, NYCERS has denied her application for an early retirement six times.

In 2008, she was diagnosed with stage 3 angiosarcoma and while chemotherapy and radiation later put her in remission, the cancer and the procedures she had to fight it took a grave toll on her body.

She still suffers from post-mastectomy chronic pain syndrome, a condition called osteomalacia, which softens the bones, peripheral neuropathy and degenerative disc disease, she said.

In 2014, she was determined to be “partially permanently disabled” by the FDNY.

“Functionally she is unable to grip. She cannot lift. She has difficulty with pins and needles and numbness into her fingers and toes. She cannot grasp the stretcher,” Dr. K. J. Kelly, the chief medical officer for the FDNY at the time, wrote in a report after Rodriguez was examined.

“She cannot kneel or bend and would have difficulty carrying out all essential tasks of an EMT.”

Rodriguez went back to work as a dispatcher but when desk work also proved too taxing, she went out on unlimited sick leave in 2019 as she continued to fight with NYCERS.

She currently has three options – continue her costly legal battle with NYCERS, take an early retirement where she’d get half her pension, or about \$25,000 a year, or return back to work for four years so she can get her full pension, which she said she is unable to do.

“My body is deteriorating as time progresses, chemo induced, radiation induced, therapy induced, medication induced. I don’t understand what they’re doing,” said Rodriguez.

“Soon I’ll be applying for welfare, Medicaid, whatever the government provides.”

EMS Capt. Julio Marrero now suffers from 9/11-related post traumatic stress disorder. Tomas E. Gaston Julio Marrero, 55, is a Bronx-based EMS captain who spent a month collecting body parts at Ground Zero and now suffers from 9/11-related post traumatic stress disorder.

His mental health was worsened in June 2020, when Lt. Matthew Keene, who worked with Marrero at EMS Station 17 in the Bronx, [shot himself in the head](#).

Marrero went out on unlimited sick leave soon after, only to learn on July 8 he'd be fired if he didn't return to work.

“‘Disappointed’ is a big word for me right now. We ran towards the danger to help people on that day. Despite my injuries and everything I gave, I was proud to do my job for another 20-plus years,” said Marrero.

“It’s unreal to me that I’m going through this. This is really happening to me right now? I dedicated my life to this department, to the city of New York. Why are you doing this? We survived the World Trade Center. We gave so much to you. Why am I being put in a position where I’m being terminated without pay, without health insurance, like a piece of garbage?”

Marrero has been denied from NYCERS once and is in the process of appealing, a process that’s already taken two years, he said.

In the meantime, he plans to live off of his savings until it runs out within the next couple of months.

EMT Judi DePietro, 56, developed a slew of 9/11-related injuries after spending more than a year collecting body parts at Ground Zero, including chronic sinusitis, PTSD, asthma, GERD and sleep apnea. She’s been on sick leave since 2019 after her panic attacks and breathing issues made it too difficult to work and has been trying to secure her three-quarters benefits with NYCERS ever since.

“I gave every piece of paperwork I had, every certification, and they threw out the case, saying none of my conditions have to do with 9/11,” said DePietro.

“All of a sudden, I’m off payroll ... I have a mortgage, bills, car payments. It’s a bad situation. All those months I worked down there without relief, and this is what they’re doing. It makes me feel horrible. It’s very, very disheartening.”

Lt. Conrad Matos, 50, was diagnosed with 9/11-related brain cancer in Dec. 2020 and can no longer drive after having a seizure.

A week ago, he learned he’d exceeded his one year of “unlimited” sick time when he got a call from FDNY brass while on vacation with his wife in Florida.

“He asked me, because he heard background noise, where I’m at right now. I said, ‘I’m in Florida with my wife.’ It’s been three years since we’ve done anything. We’ve decided to take a break and get away from all the stress. He’s like, ‘Obviously you’re feeling better,’” Matos said.

“What does that mean, ‘You’re feeling better’? You’ve got to be kidding me. I almost died for God’s sake. My wife almost lost me.”

Matos is only just now preparing to apply for an early retirement and in the meantime, plans to live off of his wife’s salary as a nurse.

“Honestly, I can’t go back. I’ve been trying to go back and there’s no way to go back,” said Matos.

“This job, they don’t take care of their own. I really feel betrayed ... I didn’t think I was going to be in this position.”

	<p>Jeff Goldberg, a partner at Goldberg & McEnaney who represents Rodriguez and DePietro, said the EMS members facing termination wouldn't need unlimited sick time on the taxpayer's dime — if they could get their early retirements through NYCERS.</p> <p>"All of these people would have been gone if NYCERS did their job. They wouldn't have to worry about getting off payroll. They would have had pension and medical coverage," Goldberg said.</p> <p>"And then they could worry about staying alive rather than worrying about how they're going to pay their kids medical bills or lunch today."</p> <p>In response, a NYCERS spokesperson said the agency reviewed 39 "valid" applications for three-quarter disability submitted by EMS members in 2021 and approved 59% of them.</p> <p>They said they were "unable to comment on specific cases, as member information is strictly confidential."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Dangerous content on Kenya social media
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/31/kenya-meta-tiktok-facebook-disinformation/
GIST	<p>NAIROBI — The shooter approaches from behind, raising a pistol to his victim's head. He pulls the trigger and "pop," a lifeless body slumps forward. The shot cuts to another execution, and another. The video was posted on Facebook, in a large group of al-Shabab and Islamic State supporters, where different versions were viewed thousands of times before being taken down.</p> <p>As Facebook and its competitor TikTok grow at breakneck speed in Kenya, and across Africa, researchers say the technology companies are failing to keep pace with a proliferation of terrorist content, hate speech and false information, taking advantage of poor regulatory frameworks to avoid stricter oversight.</p> <p>"It is a deliberate choice to maximize labor and profit extraction, because they view the societies in the Global South primarily as markets, not as societies," said Nanjala Nyabola, a Kenyan technology and social researcher.</p> <p>About 1 in 5 Kenyans use Facebook, which its parent company last year renamed itself Meta, and TikTok has become one of the most downloaded apps in the country. The prevalence of violent and inflammatory content on the platforms poses real risks in this East African nation, as it prepares for a bitterly contested presidential election next month and deals with the threat of terrorism posed by a resurgent al-Shabab.</p> <p>"Our approach to content moderation in Africa is no different than anywhere else in the world," Kojo Boakye, director of public policy for Africa, the Middle East and Turkey for Meta, wrote in an email to The Washington Post. "We prioritize safety on our platforms and have taken aggressive steps to fight misinformation and harmful content."</p> <p>Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda, the head of government relations and public policy in sub-Saharan Africa for TikTok, also responded to The Post by email, writing: "We have thousands of people working on safety all around the world, and we're continuing to expand this function in our African markets in line with the continued growth of our TikTok community on the continent."</p> <p>The companies use a two-pronged content moderation strategy: Artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms provide a first line of defense. But Meta has admitted it is challenging to teach AI to recognize hate speech in multiple languages and contexts, and reports show that posts in languages other than English often slip through the cracks.</p> <p>In June, researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue in London released a report outlining how al-Shabab and the Islamic State use Facebook to spread extremist content, like the execution video. The two-year investigation revealed at least 30 public al-Shabab and Islamic State propaganda pages with nearly</p>

40,000 combined followers. The groups posted videos depicting gruesome assassinations, suicide bombings, attacks on Kenyan military forces and Islamist militant training exercises. Some content had lived on the platform for more than six years.

Reliance on AI was a core problem, said Moustafa Ayad, one of the authors of the report, because bad actors have learned how to game the system. If the terrorists know the AI is looking for the word jihad, Ayad explained, they can “split up J.I.H.A.D with periods in between the letters, so now it is not being read properly by the AI system.”

Ayad said most of the accounts flagged in the report have now been removed, but similar content has since popped up, such as a video posted in July featuring Fuad Mohamed Khalaf, an al-Shabab [leader wanted](#) by the U.S. government. It garnered 141,000 views and 1,800 shares before being removed after 10 days.

Terrorist groups can also bypass human moderation, the second line of defense for social media companies, by exploiting language and cultural expertise gaps, the report said. The national languages in Kenya are English and Swahili, but Kenyans speak dozens of other tribal languages, dialects and the local slang known as Sheng.

Meta said it has a 350-person multidisciplinary team, including native Arabic, Somali and Swahili speakers, who monitor and handle terrorist content. Between January and March, the company claims to have removed 15 million pieces of content that violated its terrorism policies but did not say how much terrorist content it believes to still be on the platform.

In January 2019, al-Shabab attacked the DusitD2 complex in Nairobi, killing 21 people. A [government investigation](#) later revealed they planned the attack using a Facebook account that remained undetected for six months, according to local media.

During the Kenyan election in 2017, [journalists documented](#) how Facebook struggled to rein in the spread of ethnically charged hate speech, an issue researchers say the company is still failing to address. Adding to their worries now is the growing popularity of TikTok, which is also being used to inflame tensions ahead of the presidential vote in August.

In June, the Mozilla Foundation released a [report outlining](#) how election disinformation in Kenya has taken root on TikTok. The report examined more than 130 videos from 33 accounts that had been viewed more than 4 million times, finding ethnic-based hate speech as well as manipulated and false content that violated TikTok policies.

One video clip mimicked a detergent commercial in which the narrator told viewers that the “detergent” could eliminate “madoadoa,” including members of the Kamba, Kikuyu, Luhya and Luo tribes. Interpreted literally, “madoadoa” is an innocuous word meaning blemish or spot, but it can also be a coded ethnic slur and a call to violence. The video contained graphic images of post-election clashes from previous years.

After the report was published, TikTok removed the video and flagged the term “madoadoa,” but the episode showed how the nuances of language can elude human moderators. A TikTok whistleblower told report author Odanga Madung that she was asked to watch videos in languages she did not speak and determine, from looking at images alone, whether they violated its guidelines.

TikTok did not directly respond to that allegation when asked for comment by The Post, but the company issued a [recent statement](#) about efforts to address problematic election content. TikTok said it moderates content in more than 60 languages, including Swahili, but declined to give additional details about its moderators in Kenya or the number of languages it monitors. It has also launched an operations center for Kenya with experts who detect and remove posts that violate its policies. And in July, it rolled out an user [guide containing](#) election and media literacy information.

	<p>“We have a dedicated team working to safeguard TikTok during the Kenyan elections,” Mgwili-Sibanda wrote. “We prohibit and remove election misinformation, promotions of violence and other violations of our policies.”</p> <p>But researchers still worry that violent rhetoric online could lead to real violence. “One will see these lies really turn into very tragic consequences for people attending rallies,” said Irungu Houghton, director of Amnesty International Kenya.</p> <p>Researchers say TikTok and Meta can get away with lower content moderation standards in Kenya, in part because Kenyan law does not directly hold social media companies responsible for harmful content on their platforms. By contrast, the Facebook Act in Germany fines companies up to \$50 million if they do not remove “clearly illegal” content within 24 hours after a user files a complaint.</p> <p>“This is quite a gray area,” said Mugambi Laibuta, a Kenyan lawyer. “When you’re talking about hate speech, there’s no law in Kenya that states that these sites should enforce content moderation.”</p> <p>If Meta and TikTok do not police themselves, experts warn, African governments will do it for them, possibly in anti-democratic and dangerous ways. “If the platforms don’t get their act together, they become convenient excuses for authoritarians to clamp down on them across the continent” and “a convenient excuse for them to disappear,” Madung said. “And we all need these platforms to survive. We need them to thrive.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 DOJ: domestic terror spike from Jan 6 riots
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/doj-admits-spike-domestic-terrorism-172015556.html
GIST	<p>The Justice Department acknowledged that statistics showing a surging rate of domestic terrorism related cases in the last two years can largely be traced to the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riots.</p> <p>"That number does include the Jan. 6 cases, and there, of course, we have over 800 arrests of individuals – not all of them are characterized as domestic violent extremists, to be clear, but many are," Assistant Attorney General Matt Olsen said during testimony in front of the House Judiciary Committee last week. "Those do account for at least a significant portion of that jump over the past two years in the number of investigations."</p> <p>The remarks come as some critics have accused the FBI and DOJ of purposefully inflating the amount of domestic terrorism related cases to appease the Biden administration, which has said domestic terrorism represents the "largest threat" facing the country.</p> <p>Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, sent a letter to FBI Director Chris Wray last week demanding answers after he said "brave whistleblowers" came to him with information indicating the agency was inflating the number of domestic extremism cases.</p> <p>"From recent protected disclosures, we have learned that FBI officials are pressuring agents to reclassify cases as ‘domestic violent extremism’ even if the cases do not meet the criteria for such a classification," Jordan wrote in the letter. "Given the narrative pushed by the Biden administration that domestic violent extremism is the ‘greatest threat’ facing our country, revelation that the FBI may be artificially padding domestic terrorism data is scandalous."</p> <p>Wray testified in front of the House Judiciary Committee last year that the FBI had "doubled the amount of domestic terrorism investigations," seemingly lending credence to President Biden's argument that domestic terrorism represented a growing and "lethal threat" to national security.</p> <p>During his testimony last week, Olsen said "the number of FBI investigations of suspected domestic violent extremism has more than doubled since the spring of 2020," but he could not clarify how much of that surge was due to arrests of Jan. 6 suspects.</p>

Return to Top	<p>"I don't have a specific number on that," he said.</p> <p>Jordan believes at least part of that jump could also be the result of the FBI's push to reclassify cases as domestic terrorism that otherwise wouldn't have been.</p> <p>"We have received accusations that FBI agents are bolstering the number of cases of DVEs to satisfy their superiors. For example, one whistleblower explained that because agents are not finding enough DVE cases, they are encouraged and incentivized to reclassify cases as DVE cases even though there is minimal, circumstantial evidence to support the reclassification," Jordan wrote in the letter.</p> <p>"Another whistleblower – who led at least one high-profile domestic terrorism investigation – stated that a field office Counterterrorism Assistant Special Agent in Charge and the FBI's Director of the Counterterrorism Division have pressured agents to move cases into the DVE category to hit self-created performance metrics. According to whistleblowers, the FBI uses these metrics to dispense awards and promotions. Every whistleblower has called it an environment of 'pressure' within the FBI," he continued.</p> <p>Jordan argued the practice would cheapen actual instances of domestic violence and extremism for the benefit of a political agenda.</p> <p>"It appears instead that the FBI is more focused on classifying investigations to meet a woke left-wing agenda," Jordan concluded.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/01 Taliban-brokered TTP talks end in deadlock
SOURCE	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2368852/taliban-brokered-ttp-talks-end-in-deadlock
GIST	<p>The talks between Pakistan and the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have reached a deadlock as the militant group refused to budge from its demand for the reversal of the merger of erstwhile Fata with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.</p> <p>There has also been a stalemate over the issue of TTP laying down their arms in case of a peace deal, which would enable them to return to their homeland.</p> <p>Sources familiar with the development revealed that there had been a series of meetings between the two sides in recent weeks to break the impasse yet there had been no breakthrough so far.</p> <p>In a latest push to take the process forwards, Pakistan sent a second delegation in a week to break the stalemate. Following the visit of a delegation of Ulema led by Mufti Taqi Usmani, a tribal jirga arrived in Kabul on Saturday.</p> <p>The purpose of the Ulema delegation's visit was to use the good offices of the religious clerics to persuade the TTP to withdraw their demand for Fata merger and other contentious issues.</p> <p>However, the TTP leadership did not give any firm assurance as the Ulema also pressed them to lay down their arms and return to Pakistan.</p> <p>Usmani termed his visit positive but did not mention his interaction with the TTP.</p> <p>“There is a deadlock. And the prospects of a peace deal are not bright,” a source connected to the peace efforts said.</p> <p>Pakistan began talks with the TTP in October last year at the request of the Afghan Taliban to seek a political solution to the issue.</p> <p>The initial contacts led to a one-month ceasefire between the two sides in November but the truce could not last long as differences emerged soon.</p>

The TTP sought the release of prisoners including some hardcore members who were involved in terrorist attacks. Pakistan did release certain TTP members but the process could not move forward.

The breakdown in talks led to a spike in cross-border terrorist attacks by the TTP. In April, two dozen Pakistani security forces were martyred in a series of cross-border attacks. Some of the attacks filmed by the TTP showed the terrorists using sophisticated weapons.

The increase in attacks prompted Pakistan to launch air strikes across the border targeting the TTP's hideouts. Islamabad also in a rare move issued a stern warning to the Afghan Taliban not to allow the Afghan soil to be used against the neighbouring country.

The warning coupled with air strikes compelled the Afghan Taliban to bring the TTP once again to the negotiating table. The renewed talks brokered the ceasefire and both sides agreed to take the process forward.

At a closed door briefing for the members of parliament, the military leadership said the fear of TTP fighters joining Da'esh was the primary reason Pakistan was seeking a peace deal with the TTP.

Islamabad fears that if the TTP or its splinter groups join Da'esh, it would multiply Pakistan's security challenges. Pakistan is also concerned that this scenario will be exploited by external players including India.

Pakistan was hoping that peace deal with the TTP or its certain breakaway factions would weaken the terrorist network.

Also Pakistan gave peace a chance as the Afghan Taliban were not willing to take any action against the TTP. "We want to exhaust all options [before using force]," another source said. "That will be a last resort."

According to Pakistani authorities' assessment, the talks were not progressing well and Pakistan was ready for any eventuality.

The sticking point remained the Fata reforms which the TTP vehemently opposed. Pakistani interlocutors have told the TTP in clear terms that the Fata merger with K-P was the result of bipartisan consensus and it was done through the constitutional amendment.

The military, which is spearheading the talks with TTP, assured parliament that any peace deal with the terrorist outfit would be strictly in conformity with the Constitution.

The government has constituted a parliamentary oversight committee to ensure that no unconstitutional or illegal demand of the TTP is accepted.

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HEADLINE	07/31 Al-Shabab firing squad publicly executes 7
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-militants-executes-7-by-firing-squad-in-somalia-/6681012.html
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU — Somali-based militant group al-Shabab has executed seven men in Somalia's southwestern region of Bay.</p> <p>The execution that was conducted publicly took place in the vicinity of Buula-Fulay in Somalia's Bay region late Saturday.</p> <p>Six of the executed men were accused of spying for the Somali government and the U.S.</p> <p>Three of them were also accused of providing intelligence that led to the killing of senior al-Shabab leaders, Yusuf Jiis and Abdulkadir Commandos, who were targeted in U.S. airstrikes in 2020.</p>

	<p>An al-Shabab judge told local spectators that the six men have confessed, without providing evidence. Al-Shabab courts don't allow lawyers who can defend the accused.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Ethiopia's Somali state president Mustafe Omar said that the region's special forces operations against al-Shabab militants inflicted the group heavy casualties.</p> <p>He said they believe that the troops killed 600 al-Shabab fighters during their operations against the militant group who a week ago infiltrated Ethiopia, sparking new confrontations near the Ethiopian border with Somalia.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Report: extremism surging in Pakistan
SOURCE	https://theprint.in/world/extremism-surging-in-pakistan-434-attacks-in-last-six-months-report/1063354/
GIST	<p>Islamabad [Pakistan], July 31 (ANI): In wake of surging extremist violence in Pakistan, the Shahbaz Sharif-led country's government has launched several operations to tackle it, among which the failed peace talks with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).</p> <p>According to the Pakistan government, the terrorists target security forces, state institutions, and civilians in the country. The Interior Ministry said that there have been 434 terrorist attacks in Pakistan within the last six months, The Nation reported.</p> <p>This comes in the backdrop of the peace talks with the TTP which has refused to budge from its hardline stance.</p> <p>The ongoing bid of TTP to enter the political mainstream in Pakistan may face obstruction as several experts feel that the outlawed group will harm and shrink the political space for citizens of the country.</p> <p>Islamabad agreed to hold fresh talks with the group under the auspices of the interim Taliban government in Afghanistan.</p> <p>A high-level military huddle in Pakistan has discussed "peace talks" with the banned TTP and decided to pursue the matter in accordance with a "comprehensive security strategy".</p> <p>Chaired by Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Nadeem Raza, the national security meeting was held on July 22.</p> <p>The Nation News said that the details of the report presented in the Upper House of parliament stated that the highest number of 247 terrorist attacks were recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa followed by 171 in Balochistan, 12 in Sindh and one in Punjab province.</p> <p>The impact of such terrorist activities has disproportionately affected Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and a stalemate in peace talks, The Nation reported.</p> <p>Recently, at least six terrorists were killed in an exchange of fire in the district of Kech, as per Pakistani media.</p> <p>The Ulema delegation was unable to convince the TTP to halt attacks and hold peace talks as both sides were skeptical of one another. (ANI)</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Canada man joined ISIS sentenced to life
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/07/29/khalifa-life-sentence-isis-propaganda/
GIST	<p>A Canadian man who was radicalized online, uprooted his life and joined the Islamic State in Syria, rising to a top position in the terrorist group's English-language propaganda arm, was sentenced Friday to life in prison.</p>

[Mohammed Khalifa](#), 39, was the English-language narrator in approximately 15 Islamic State propaganda videos, including some of its most influential and violent fare, prosecutors said.

But he also had a starring role.

Khalifa admitted that he appears in the final scenes of two documentary-length Islamic State videos — “Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun” and “Flames of War II: Until the Final Hour” — executing Syrian soldiers who had been forced to dig their own graves.

Khalifa pleaded guilty in December to conspiring to provide material support to terrorism resulting in death.

Prosecutors asked for the maximum penalty of life in prison. Khalifa’s attorneys had requested a sentence of 20 years, noting that he had killed two Syrian soldiers but no Americans, and that he had a wife and three children. The text of the statute under which Khalifa was charged does not require that victims who died be American.

U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III described Khalifa as “the Pied Piper who played the tune,” enabling the Islamic State to reach English speakers in the United States and Europe with violent propaganda.

Federal prosecutors said it was effective. The Islamic State recruited 40,000 to 60,000 foreign fighters to Syria in the years it was waging war for control of parts of that country, they said, and Khalifa was an “instrumental” figure producing English-language content for videos, audio statements and an online magazine.

Ellis said Khalifa’s sentence “has to stand as a warning, as a beacon, to others.”

“Don’t become the [recruiting tool for ISIS](#) or any other terrorist organization,” the judge said.

Khalifa was born in Saudi Arabia, lived in Canada from a young age, earned a college degree in computer systems technology in Toronto, and then started watching online videos during the Arab Spring that eventually led him to Syria, particularly the lectures of the al-Qaeda organizer Anwar al-Awlaki, Khalifa stated in plea documents.

In a letter to the judge in January, Khalifa wrote that he had left behind a “comfortable home,” a “promising career” and marriage prospects in Canada because he was disquieted by the attacks on Syria’s Muslim population by the country’s president, Bashar al-Assad.

Prosecutors in the Eastern District of Virginia argued that Khalifa was aware of the Islamic State’s activities torturing, ransoming and executing humanitarian aid workers and journalists while he served in the militant group’s propaganda bureau.

Khalifa admitted he joined the Islamic State in 2013 and was captured in 2019 after a firefight with the Syrian Democratic Forces. He swore a fighting oath twice to Islamic State leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#). He sought and received a “fatwa,” or religious dispensation, to battle the U.S-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Abu Badran, Syria, after Islamic State leaders had issued an order to flee.

In online communications, Khalifa referred to journalists and humanitarian workers being targeted by the Islamic State as “disbelievers” with whom the militant group “had no covenant.” In a broadcast, Khalifa called the shooter behind the 2019 Pulse nightclub massacre in Orlando, Omar Mateen, “our brother” and noted that it was the deadliest terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11. Khalifa referred to the victims at the gay nightclub as “filthy crusaders” and “sodomites,” prosecutors said.

“The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, employed media and propaganda masterfully as part of its campaign of terror during the 2013-2018 time period,” federal prosecutors said in a sentencing brief.

Khalifa “served as one of the Islamic State’s most prolific propagandists during the terrorist organization’s surge” and “personally engaged in extreme acts of violence to further the goals of ISIS.”

Edward Ungvarsky, an attorney for Khalifa, had argued that a life sentence would be “grossly excessive.” He declined to comment after Ellis’s ruling.

“Not only did he express regret over their conduct, he affirmatively created a ‘counter narrative’ set of videos in the hopes he could persuade others to turn away from ISIS in the future and not repeat the mistakes that he made,” Ungvarsky and Cary Citronberg, another attorney for Khalifa, wrote in a sentencing brief. They also had argued that Khalifa should get prison-time credit for the rough treatment he received while held captive by the SDF.

Khalifa was captured in January 2019 and turned over to U.S. custody at the end of September 2019.

In a news release after the sentencing, prosecutors said the “Flames of War” videos in which Khalifa is both the voice-over narrator and an executioner on the footage “glamorized portrayals of ISIS and its fighters as well as scenes of violence.”

In a court filing, prosecutors said Khalifa did not go down without a fight.

“When he had the opportunity to surrender to the Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria in 2019, the defendant threw multiple grenades and fired his AK-47 at Syrian soldiers to continue his murderous campaign on behalf of ISIS,” prosecutors said.

In Abu Badran, Khalifa, “alone and armed with three grenades and an AK-47, threw a grenade on the roof of a house where SDF soldiers were standing,” according to prosecutors.

“The grenade detonated and the defendant ran into the house and attempted to go to the roof, but an SDF soldier was firing from the stairs,” according to prosecutors’ sentencing brief. “The defendant began firing at the SDF soldier and attempted to use all three of his grenades during the attack. The defendant fired most of his ammunition during the assault before his AK-47 jammed. The defendant was unable to clear his weapon. The defendant received shrapnel injuries to his left leg, right leg, left arm and other parts of his body during the firefight.”

He surrendered after his rifle jammed, prosecutors said.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	07/29 Highways in minority areas pothole messes
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgyyyq/government-highways-in-poor-minority-neighborhoods-more-likely-to-be-potholed-messes
GIST	<p>Highways in neighborhoods with high rates of family poverty, concentrated minority populations, and urban areas are more likely to be in bad condition than the average highway road in the country, according to a new study by the Government Accountability Office, a federal agency. It claims to be one of the first studies of its kind to systematically compare highway pavement quality based on socioeconomic factors.</p> <p>By law, state departments of transportation must submit a report every two years to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) describing the condition of the highways in the state. They also report targets for “good,” “fair,” and “poor” pavement ratings—“fair” are highways with cracks, “poor” are ones with potholes—to be measured every four years. Generally, no more than five percent of a state’s interstate system lane miles can be in poor condition, according to the GAO. It combined these reports with</p>

geospatial analysis and Census data to analyze how pavement quality differed by socioeconomic factors like income and race, something the FHWA does not itself do.

The GAO broke down the results by grouping Census tracts into quartiles, the first quartile being the lowest percentage of “underserved racial and ethnic population,” as the GAO put it, and the fourth quartile being the highest.

Similarly, the analysis for poverty rates put the richest people in Quartile 1 and the poorest in Quartile 4. In both cases, Quartile 4 had a higher percentage of highways in poor condition and a lower percentage in good condition.

For the racial and ethnic minority breakdown, Quartile 4 had nearly three times the number of highway miles in poor condition than Quartile 1—3.7 percent compared to 1.3 percent. And the tracts with the highest percentages of minority residents had 15 percent fewer lane miles of road in good condition compared to the first quartile. This was a bigger difference in poor road quality than the breakdown based on poverty rates, where the fourth quartile had 3.2 percent in poor condition versus 2.3 percent in the first quartile.

The biggest difference, though, was the comparison of urban versus rural roads, where 4 percent of urban roads were in poor condition compared to 1.2 percent rural and suburban roads.

These differences may not seem big in absolute terms, but they’re quite large in relative ones. The actual differences are also larger than raw numbers show, because they don’t account for other factors like population density, traffic numbers, and climate, which will also affect pavement quality. After controlling for those factors, GAO found that urban neighborhoods with a low percentage of underserved populations have a 22 percent chance of good pavement versus a 7 percent chance for areas with high percentages of underserved populations. For rural areas or small towns, the chance of good pavement is almost 60 percent for white areas. But for minority areas, the chances of good pavement go down to just 30 percent. These differences are greater than measuring based on poverty rates alone.

It has been [well-documented by highway engineers](#) that driving on poor roads increases fuel consumption and operating costs, because cars are more likely to break down on rougher, poorly maintained surfaces. GAO’s findings suggest that the higher likelihood of poor road conditions in their neighborhoods acts as an added tax on minorities and low-income U.S. residents, increasing the amount of money they spend on gas and also making the sudden need for emergency repairs more likely.

The GAO report did not offer any theories for the widespread discrepancy in road conditions, but it is another example of how structural racism and classism has become deeply embedded in modern institutions.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Theme parks not meant for Black families
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2022/jul/30/sesame-place-theme-parks-black-families-racism
GIST	<p>In his sermons, Martin Luther King Jr often made reference to his daughter Yolanda Denise seeing him off to the Atlanta airport before work trips and passing an amusement center called Funtown along the way. When she’d ask if he could take her some day, he’d always find a way to change the subject because he couldn’t bear telling her that she “couldn’t go to Funtown because of the color of her skin”.</p> <p>When they were first built in the early 20th century, amusement parks were not intended for Black families. And while, 70 years on, King’s dream of seeing Black and white children play “as sisters and brothers” has mostly come true, the past week offered a stark reminder of the progress there still is to make.</p>

On Wednesday a Black father accusing multiple characters at Sesame Place, “a children’s theme park celebrating Sesame Street”, of snubbing his five-year-old daughter during a meet-and greet filed a \$25m lawsuit against the amusement park for “pervasive and appalling” racial discrimination.

The lawsuit, filed in a Philadelphia federal court, comes less than a week after a Brooklyn woman named Jodi Brown posted a nine-second video of her young daughter and niece being spurned by an employee in costume as the character Rosita. That clip, which is closing in on a million views, prompted other parents to share video proof of Rosita, Zoe and other characters at the park passing up their kids to hug and high-five with fairer-skinned children.

Amid public calls for a boycott of Sesame Place, the Congressional Black Caucus and NAACP have asked to meet with executives at the park’s parent company, Seaworld Parks and Entertainment. On Saturday, a few dozen protesters rallied for hours outside Sesame Place, which is located in the north-east Philadelphia suburb of Langhorne.

In the federal lawsuit, which seeks to become a class action, Quinton Burns of Maryland alleges that when he and his five-year-old daughter attended a Sesame Place meet-and-greet on Fathers’ Day, they were purposely ignored by four costumed performers playing Ernie, Elmo, Telly and Abby. On Wednesday, Burns [released](#) his own 29-second video of the characters passing over his daughter for a high five to interact with white children. “Just looking at her face, it makes me want to cry every time I see it,” Burns said at a courthouse news conference.

Sesame Workshop, which created the park’s characters and owns the licensing rights but does not own the park, has been quick to condemn the incidents and urged park executives to act swiftly.

It almost beggars belief that Sesame Street could be associated with a racial discrimination lawsuit. The children’s TV series was conceived amid the social justice movement of the 1960s as edutainment for - children from disadvantaged backgrounds and an inclusionary showcase for Black and Hispanic actors. The state of Mississippi banished the show from its airwaves in 1970 for having too diverse a cast. The character Rosita, who has been around since 1991, hails from Mexico and was Sesame Street’s first regularly appearing bilingual muppet, toggling between Spanish and English.

But the history of a radical and diverse TV show clashes with the story of amusement parks in America. The 1875 Civil Rights Act included a line mandating equal access to public accommodations, but the supreme court wound up undermining the latitude to enforce that law.

This meant that at the 1904 World’s Fair, which was held in St Louis [in conjunction with a disastrous summer Olympics](#), put Black and brown bodies on display. A group of African pygmies branded savages were showcased in a hollow that had a walkway over the top so white visitors could point down and laugh. A year later one of the men in the exhibition, Otis Benga, was relegated to [a Bronx Zoo display cage](#).

Amusement parks as we know them today, says Victoria Wolcott, a University of Buffalo history professor whose 2012 book [Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters](#) takes in the dark arc of public leisure space in the US, “emerged at the nadir of race relations”, as the country was segueing out of reconstruction into segregation. The parks were often marketed with dog whistles like “clean” or “safe”, and they stationed sentinels at their gates to enforce the whites-only policy. If a Black family did happen on to the grounds in these early days, they could expect to be beaten bloody for their mistake.

At Coney Island, park operators made games out of brutality. The park, like many in the US in the early 20th century, had an attraction called the African Dodger, in which white ticket holders would attempt to hit baseballs at the heads of actual Black people – a number of whom suffered broken noses, teeth and other serious injuries.

“This was not that long ago,” says Dewey Clayton, a University of Louisville political science professor who vividly remembers not being able to set foot inside the white section of a Myrtle Beach amusement park the same July day President Lyndon Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Right Act into law. “It was in my

lifetime. Too many of my colleagues here at the university and in the area have had just really sad experiences like that as children.”

The exception among amusement parks was Disneyland, which didn’t discriminate among would-be customers as long as they could fork up the money for an entrance fee, which few other parks charged at that time. But while Black families were allowed at Disneyland, the cover charge and lack of public transportation to access the park meant it was out of reach for many.

The Congress of Racial Equality, which bolstered King’s non-violent activism, was formed largely in response to discrimination at theme parks and other recreational spaces. “One of the things that was really so sad was reading memoirs of African American activists who talked about that exclusion when they were children as being absolutely searing,” Wolcott says.

In 2013, a Black family from San Diego sued Disney for discrimination after their children were snubbed by an employee in costume as White Rabbit, the time-obsessed character from Alice in Wonderland. The case, actually titled Black v White, was quickly settled for an undisclosed sum. It could serve as precedent in what could be a landmark class-action suit against Sesame Place.

In a series of statements last week, Sesame Place issued “heartbroken” apologies to the affected families and vowed to institute mandatory bias training for employees. It has thus far declined to say if any employees had been disciplined.

Win or lose, Burns, the father who brought this legal action, hopes to send a clear message: “This is unacceptable,” he said at his news conference, “and we will not stand by and let this continue.”

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HEADLINE	07/29 Mediterranean ecosystem ‘marine wildfire’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/29/mediterranean-ecosystem-suffering-marine-wildfire-as-temperatures-peak
GIST	<p>Parts of the Mediterranean are more than 6C warmer than normal for the time of year, scientists have said, sparking fears that the sea’s fragile ecosystems are suffering the equivalent of a “marine wildfire” and being permanently altered by global heating.</p> <p>Water temperatures have been well above average since May and hit a peak of 30.7C off the eastern coast of Corsica last weekend, meaning the summer of 2022 is likely to set new records for both the intensity and duration of the marine heatwave.</p> <p>Several areas of southern France this month experienced record air temperatures, which combined with low winds has produced a layer of surface water that is significantly hotter and much deeper than usual, marine ecologists say.</p> <p>“A water temperature of 28C or 29C may feel pleasant to bathers, but it is worrying for the Mediterranean’s ecosystems,” Frédéric Denhez told BFMTV. “The Mediterranean is starting to resemble the Red Sea, and its species are not adapted to that.”</p> <p>Rubén del Campo of the Spanish national meteorological service told Le Monde that with cooler deep water no longer rising to the surface, the Mediterranean’s native populations of “corals, of shellfish and of fish are suffering enormously”.</p> <p>Scientists consider the Mediterranean a biodiversity hotspot, accounting for less than 1% of the world’s ocean surface but home to about 10% of all marine species. The sea hosts up to 20,000 marine species of fauna and flora, 25% of which are endemic.</p>

“The most adaptable organisms will resist – although they may become weaker – by adjusting their physiology or migrating,” said Emilie Villar, a Marseille-based marine ecologist. “But weaker ones are likely to perish,” [she told La Provence newspaper](#).

In all, 700 Mediterranean species are threatened with extinction, Villar said. “If the shock lasts too long, or if the species is fixed and cannot migrate, others will fill the void – or, if conditions become too harsh, the Mediterranean risks dying out.”

[One recent study](#) found maritime heatwaves had already destroyed up to 90% of coral populations in parts of the Mediterranean, with red corals and gorgonians or sea fans particularly hard hit. Sea urchins and sea sponges have also been badly affected.

David Diaz of the Spanish oceanographic institute told Le Monde such ocean heatwaves were “the equivalent of underwater wildfires, with fauna and flora dying just as if they had been burned”.

Posidonia or Neptune grass, which is endemic to the Mediterranean and plays a key role for ecosystems by storing CO₂, has also been severely affected, scientists say. The scale of destruction is “not surprising”, said the oceanographer Jean-Pierre Gattuso.

“We are seeing both a gradual overall warming, which leads to a steady migration of marine species, and sudden spells of intense warming, which is causing significant mortality,” Gattuso told BFMTV.

A WWF report last year found that water temperatures in the Mediterranean were rising 20% faster than the global average, making it the world’s fastest-warming sea.

Nearly 1,000 exotic species – including 126 species of fish, several of them highly invasive and destructive of the Mediterranean’s marine habitat – had already migrated into the sea, the report said, some from the Red Sea via the Suez Canal.

The previous temperature record for the Mediterranean was set in August 2018, when the water off Marseille was measured at 6.6C higher than the seasonal average, while the sea’s longest marine heatwave so far observed was in 2003, lasting from 3 August to 2 September.

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HEADLINE	07/29 Ferry ‘off course’, ‘too fast’ before collision
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/map-tracking-system-shows-cathlamet-ferry-off-course-around-time-of-collision
GIST	<p>West Seattle, wash. - Map-tracking systems are shedding more light on the path the Cathlamet Ferry took before crashing into a group of pilings as it approached the Fauntleroy ferry dock on Thursday.</p> <p>One system shows that the ferry was moving well south of the boat's typical routes when it experienced what Washington State Ferries described as a "hard landing."</p> <p>A WSF spokesperson confirmed Friday that the ferry was "off course" and going "too fast" when it collided with the section of posts often called a "dolphin."</p> <p>Regulars on the ferry made similar observations while on the boat Thursday, telling FOX 13 that the ferry had appeared to drift off its normal track before the crash.</p> <p>"It was just a big crash and kind of shook the truck a little bit," said Jeremy, a regular rider on the Cathlamet Ferry.</p> <p>He was one of the passengers on board the Cathlamet Ferry when it hit the posts Thursday.</p>

"There was a split second there when it [started to crumple in the front](#). I thought maybe this is [it], maybe we are going down," he said.

Jeremy has been riding for about 30 years and had returned once again to get back on the Fauntleroy Ferry Terminal route Friday when we talked with him.

"It's not the first time they have actually [brushed a pylon out there](#). It's the hardest they have ever hit one," said Jeremy.

A ship-tracking map showed the Cathlamet Ferry come in from the south, accelerating from around 4 knots to around 12 knots around the time it likely hit the dolphin posts. Then, the map showed it making a turn towards the shore before reversing course and heading into the dock.

"It's the most offshore dolphin that took the hit," said Ian Sterling with Washington State Ferries. "It would be a few hundred feet, about 200- 300 feet offshore there."

A ferry and a structure at the Fauntleroy Ferry Terminal in West Seattle were damaged Thursday morning after a crash at the dock.

On Friday, Sterling said, "It was way off course and going way too fast for what it was."

He said the ferry also didn't go to the inside of the landing, where the bumpers would be placed on the pilings to protect the ship. Instead, he said the ship [hit the outside of the "dolphin" where there was nothing to buffer the boat](#). The posts then [sliced open a portion of the ship](#) like a tin can.

"It hit the offshore pilings, kind of on the outside of the pilings which is not normal, and it did it at speed," said Sterling.

We spoke to a retired captain who once worked for Washington State Ferries about the tracking map. He said that the speed that was indicated on the map, 12 knots at one point, was very unusual.

"Normally by that point in time, you'd want to be down 6 knots, maybe 8. If the wind is blowing really hard, if the current is setting pretty hard," said Mike Schilling, a retired Washington State Ferries captain. He says the investigation into what happened on the ship will be important in figuring out the cause of the crash.

"I saw a still shot of the vessel alongside the dolphin, which is not where the vessel should be at all. The 'why' of how it got there will have to be answered by the Coast Guard Investigation," said Schilling.

Sterling has said that the [investigation into what went wrong could take weeks to months](#). The results for the drug and alcohol tests on the crew members were not back Friday afternoon.

"We are not sure there is no smoking gun what happened here, as far as mechanical failure or anything like that," said Sterling. "I can tell you that all the crew, as standard procedure, will be drug and alcohol tested and have already been. That's already been done. We are awaiting results there, and we are working with our federal partners and others to really investigate what happened here. We want to know, so it doesn't happen again."

Riders said Friday morning there were delays on the route. Sterling says Washington State Ferries brought in the Kitsap Ferry to replace the damaged Cathlamet Ferry. Unfortunately, he said the Kitsap had some electrical issues Friday morning with steering control. He said a team had fixed that by Friday afternoon, and it was back in service.

Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	07/31 Mass shooting downtown Orlando: 7 hurt
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/31/us/orlando-downtown-mass-shooting/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)At least seven shooting victims were hospitalized Sunday after a melee in downtown Orlando, Florida.</p> <p>The violence erupted around 2 a.m. ET Sunday after a large fight broke out, Orlando Police Chief Eric D. Smith said.</p> <p>An unidentified assailant pulled out a handgun and fired into the crowd, injuring seven people.</p> <p>All seven victims were taken to a nearby hospital, where they were listed in stable condition, Smith said. Authorities do not immediately have a description of the shooter.</p> <p>According to the non-profit Gun Violence Archive, the US has had at least 381 mass shootings this year.</p> <p>That's an average of more than 1.7 mass shootings every day.</p> <p>Both the Gun Violence Archive and CNN define a mass shooting as one in which at least four people are shot, excluding the shooter.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Madagascar bandits set homes fire; kill 32
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-07-31/at-least-32-people-killed-after-bandits-set-homes-on-fire-in-madagascar
GIST	<p>ANTANANARIVO (Reuters) - At least 32 people were killed in Madagascar in an area north of the capital on Friday after local bandits known as "dahalo" set homes on fire, according to statements by the defence ministry.</p> <p>The killings occurred in Ankazobe district, about 75 kilometres (47 miles) north of the capital Antananarivo overnight into Friday.</p> <p>"People here experienced a real tragedy ... many lives were lost. 32 people died. It is a crime perpetrated by ruthless dahalo (bandits) who burned alive even women and children," Defence Minister General Richard Rakotonirina said in a video posted on the ministry's Facebook page late on Saturday said.</p> <p>The "dahalo" are organised criminal gangs in parts of Madagascar that steal cattle from community members and orchestrate other various forms of banditry.</p> <p>"We will hunt down those who committed this crime and their accomplices," Rakotonirina said, adding security forces had been deployed to the area to hunt down the perpetrators.</p> <p>He added the attack on the area was likely revenge by the "dahalo" against community members for providing information to security personnel during previous operations against them.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Salem witch trial exoneration: 329yrs later
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/31/us/elizabeth-johnson-witchcraft-exoneration.html
GIST	<p>Elizabeth Johnson Jr. is — officially — not a witch.</p> <p>Until last week, the Andover, Mass., woman, who confessed to practicing witchcraft during the Salem witch trials, was the only remaining person convicted during the trials whose name had not been cleared.</p>

Though she was sentenced to death in 1693, after she and more than 20 members of her extended family faced similar allegations, she was granted a reprieve and avoided the death sentence.

The exoneration came on Thursday, 329 years after her conviction, tucked inside a [\\$53 billion](#) state budget signed by Gov. Charlie Baker. It was the product of a three-year lobbying effort by a civics teacher and her eighth-grade class, along with a state senator who helped champion the cause.

“I’m excited and relieved,” Carrie LaPierre, the teacher at North Andover Middle School, said in an interview on Saturday, “but also disappointed I didn’t get to talk to the kids about it,” as they are on summer vacation. “It’s been such a huge project,” Ms. LaPierre added. “We called her E.J.J., all the kids and I. She just became one of our world, in a sense.”

Only the broad contours of Ms. Johnson’s life are known. She was 22 years old when accused, may have had a mental disability and never married or had children, which were factors that could make a woman a target in the trials, Ms. LaPierre said.

The governor of Massachusetts at the time granted Ms. Johnson a reprieve from death, and she died in 1747 at the age of 77. But unlike others convicted at the trials, Ms. Johnson did not have any known descendants who could fight to clear her name. [Previous efforts to exonerate people](#) convicted of witchcraft overlooked Ms. Johnson, perhaps because of administrative confusion, historians said: Her mother, who had the same name, was also convicted but was exonerated earlier.

The effort to clear Ms. Johnson’s name was a dream project for the eighth-grade civics class, Ms. LaPierre said. It allowed her to teach students about research methods, including the use of primary sources; the process by which a bill becomes a law; and ways to contact state lawmakers. The project also taught students the value of persistence: After an intensive letter-writing campaign, the bill to exonerate Ms. Johnson was essentially dead. As the students turned their efforts to lobbying the governor for a pardon, their state senator, Diana DiZoglio, added an amendment to the budget bill, reviving the exoneration effort.

“These students have set an incredible example of the power of advocacy and speaking up for others who don’t have a voice,” Ms. DiZoglio, a Democrat whose district includes North Andover, said in an interview.

At least 172 people from Salem and surrounding towns, which include what is now North Andover, were accused of witchcraft in 1692 as part of an inquisition by the Puritans that was rooted in paranoia, according to historians.

Emerson W. Baker, a history professor at Salem State University and the author of [“A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience.”](#) said there were many reasons innocent people would confess to witchcraft. Many wanted to avoid being tortured, or even believed that perhaps they might in fact be a witch and just didn’t know it, the result of a pressure campaign by religious ministers and even family members.

“At what point does she say,” Mr. Baker asked, ““For the good of the community, I probably should confess? I don’t think I’m a witch, but maybe I had some bad thoughts and I shouldn’t have had them.”” It would have been a logical thought process for a society that widely believed in the existence of witches, he said.

Another common reason for confessions, Professor Baker said, was for survival. It became clear by the summer of 1692 that those who pleaded not guilty were quickly tried, convicted and hanged while those who pleaded guilty seemed to escape that gruesome fate: All 19 people who were executed in Salem had pleaded not guilty while not one of the 55 who confessed was executed, he said.

	<p>Professor Baker said he was happy to see Ms. Johnson's name cleared. The accusations against her and her family must have ruined their lives and reputation, he said.</p> <p>"For all the government and people of Massachusetts Bay put Elizabeth and her family through," he said, exonerating her is "the least we can do."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Indiana cop shot, killed at traffic stop
SOURCE	https://readthereporter.com/elwood-police-officer-killed-in-line-of-duty/
GIST	<p>Elwood police officer Noah Shahnavaz was shot and killed Sunday morning. Carl Roy Webb Boards II, 42, Anderson, was arrested in Hamilton County after a chase involving the Sheriff's Department and Fishers PD. At press time, Boards was being held in the Hamilton County Jail on initial charges of murder with a firearm enhancement as a habitual offender.</p> <p>According to the Herald Bulletin, Shahnavaz, 24, was a five-year military veteran who had been with the Elwood Police Department for 11 months. He is survived by his parents and siblings.</p> <p>Just after 2 a.m. Sunday, Officer Shahnavaz conducted a traffic stop on a 2012 Buick LaCrosse near the intersection of State Road 37 and County Road 1100 North in Madison County. Boards exited the Buick and fired multiple rounds, striking the officer at least one time. Boards then fled the scene in the vehicle.</p> <p>According to the Indiana State Police, officers from Elwood PD and the Madison County Sheriff's Department found the wounded officer and gave life-saving aid until medical personnel arrived. The officer was taken by ambulance to Ascension St. Vincent Mercy in Elwood, and later flown by helicopter to an Indianapolis area hospital and was then pronounced dead, police say.</p> <p>Just after 2:30 a.m. Hamilton County Sheriff's Department found the Buick and attempted to initiate a traffic stop. The driver of the Buick did not stop and continued southbound on SR 37, according to ISP. Officers continued to pursue the Buick and put a tire deflation device near the area of SR 37 and 146th Street. The Buick continued southbound on SR 37 toward Interstate 69.</p> <p>Fishers PD conducted two precision immobilization techniques (PIT). After the second PIT, the Buick became stuck at the median barrier wall and became immobilized, which allowed officers to take the suspect into custody.</p> <p>Madison County Chief Deputy prosecutor Andrew Hanna told the Herald Bulletin that Boards has a lengthy criminal record that includes a conviction in 2006 for firing a weapon at Indiana State Police officers.</p> <p>Shahnavaz's body was returned on Sunday afternoon to Madison County from the hospital in Indianapolis, passing through Hamilton County on I-69, with a Sheriff's Department and local police escort.</p> <p>This is an active and ongoing investigation, according to ISP. At the completion of the investigation, this case will be turned over to the Madison County Prosecutors Office.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/31 Tacoma police: 3 shootings in 24hrs
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/series-of-3-shootings-in-24-hours-leaves-a-man-dead-others-injured-in-tacoma
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Investigators were busy this weekend after a series of three shootings Saturday and Sunday left one man dead and three injured in Tacoma. The most recent happened near S 4th Street and Dock Street early Sunday morning.</p> <p>The driveway in Thea's Park was closed for much of the day, and the grounds of the park were filled with evidence markers as investigators combed through the area looking for clues in the case.</p>

"I heard a lot of shots, 25 from what I could tell," said Dan Macourek, a neighbor. "Different handguns—two different handguns—and probably a shotgun, and then it just went quiet."

He said he heard the shots ring out some time around 3:30 a.m. near the park. By Sunday afternoon, investigators had the park blocked off as they worked the crime scene, focusing on an area around an SUV, with its doors still hanging open. At least 50 evidence markers surrounded the vehicle.

"I would not come down here even close to sunset," said Dan.

The gunfire in Thea's Park marked another shooting on a long list of violent crime that's been plaguing the city.

A relentless, evidence-based plan is what the Tacoma Police Chief believes will reduce crime in the city.

"We are at 27 homicides for 2022," said Shelbie Boyd, Tacoma Police Department officer and spokesperson.

Investigators say there have now been three shootings within a 24-hour period in which people were injured or killed.

"It has been a high year for homicides in Tacoma. It's unfortunate," said Shelbie.

In the fatal Saturday morning shooting, police say two men were firing at each other in a parking lot in the 5300 block of S Orchard street in South Tacoma. A 39-year-old man died at the scene. The shots were fired at around 5:30 a.m. The other man reportedly fled the area and police are still searching for him.

Later Saturday afternoon, just before 4 p.m., a man in his 60s was injured by gunfire near the 1100 block of South 10th. The suspect is still on the loose.

Less than 24 hours later, police say two men were seriously injured when shots rang out at Thea's Park.

"[The] caller indicated there was shooting going on, as officers were arriving into the area. One of the local area hospitals called and notified us that they received two possible gunshot victims into the hospital. So, officers secured the scene on Dock Street," said Shelbie.

So far she said there have been no arrests in the Dock Street-area shooting.

"It's sad what Tacoma's become, and Seattle and the outlying areas," said Dan.

People in Tacoma are fed up with crime, and many showed up in force Tuesday night to tell city leaders in person.

Dan said it's not unusual for him to hear gunshots in that area of Thea's Park, but he said so many at once was unnerving to him. He, like many in the city, feels something needs to be done.

"It is kind of down here on the docks, next to the tracks, so I'm not sure what they can do," said Dan. He feels that more patrols might be needed in the area of the park.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Wisconsin stabbings: 1 dead, 4 injured
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/us/apple-river-wisconsin-stabbing.html
GIST	One person was killed and four others were critically injured on Saturday after they were stabbed while tubing on the Apple River in Wisconsin, a popular summer spot that attracts visitors from across the region, the authorities said.

The suspect, a 52-year-old man from Minnesota, had left the scene but was taken into custody after a witness identified him at a point where tubers on the river exit, said Sheriff Scott Knudson of the St. Croix County Sheriff's Office.

The authorities did not release the names of the victims or the suspect. One of the victims, a 17-year-old from Minnesota, was pronounced dead after being taken to a hospital. Four additional victims in critical condition were all in their early 20s, and Sheriff Knudson said he believed they were three men and one woman. Precise ages were not immediately available and it was unclear where they were from, Sheriff Knudson said.

A motive in the stabbings was not immediately clear, and the authorities said they did not know whether the suspect knew the victims.

"I have not seen anything like this to this extent," Sheriff Knudson said of the stabbings.

He said that in Somerset, the village about 35 miles northeast of Minneapolis where the stabbing occurred, tubing "is our main attraction."

Around 3:45 p.m., the authorities received several calls about a stabbing on the Apple River, a tributary to the St. Croix River and an area popular among tubers and campers who visit from nearby St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The river is accessible by road, but the stabbings occurred in a harder-to-reach area farther up the river from where the deputies arrived, so they waded about 100 yards through waist-deep water to reach the victims, Sheriff Knudson said. First responders then treated the victims with the help of other tubers.

Several companies offer tubing on the area's rivers. For about \$20, a person can take a shuttle up the river and be dropped off with an inflatable tube to float back down, which takes about two and a half hours, according to one company.

In a news conference on Saturday, Sheriff Knudson called the events "chaotic" and "scary."

"I'm sure that anybody who witnessed this will never forget it," he said. "It is a tragedy."

He added that officials were interviewing witnesses and that he expected charges to be filed early in the week.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Downtown Everett shooting; man injured
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/man-injured-downtown-everett-shooting/UN7W5Z3JKJD7BPIKKB6APZC7I/
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Police are investigating after a man was reportedly shot multiple times in Everett early Saturday morning.</p> <p>Just before 4:45 a.m., multiple 911 callers reported hearing gunshots near the intersection of Colby Avenue and 25th Street, according to the Everett Police Department.</p> <p>Upon arriving at the scene, officers encountered a man in his 50s who has been shot multiple times.</p> <p>Several bullet holes were seen in the man's vehicle, according to police.</p> <p>The victim was transported to Providence Medical Center in stable condition.</p> <p>Police said they do not have information on a possible suspect at this time.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Bear repellent used in South Transit train
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/bear-repellent-sprayed-inside-sound-transit-light-rail-train/
GIST	<p>Up to 10 people needed help flushing chemicals from their eyes Saturday after authorities say someone sprayed bear repellent inside a train near Stadium Station in Seattle.</p> <p>The person who discharged the repellent at about 5:30 p.m. left the scene, and details weren't immediately available about what led up to the incident, said Sound Transit spokesperson Rachel Cunningham. Police have yet to identify the person who sprayed the crowd, and left the train when it stopped, said Seattle Police Department Detective Patrick Michaud. Light-rail trains are equipped with cameras covering many angles inside and outside the rail cars.</p> <p>The train was diverted to a spare track next to the station, where police arrived, and passengers evacuated, according to Cunningham. A total of 17 people were directly or indirectly exposed to the spray, she said.</p> <p>The Seattle Fire Department responded, and tweeted that up to 10 people needed help flushing chemicals from their eyes.</p> <p>Full service resumed, with delays expected across the 24-mile line, just before 6 p.m. A passenger at U District Station said he waited 30 minutes and about 100 people accumulated there until the next train showed up.</p> <p>Nick DeVaux, of Puyallup, waiting down the line at Angle Lake Station to head north, said about 75 to 90 people were gathering there with no idea when a train might show up, for half an hour. "It's hot, it's 94 degrees outside. Some people are taking their shirts off," he said. "Everyone keeps looking down the tracks expecting something to happen."</p> <p>Then at 6:22 p.m. a train rolled in, bells ringing. DeVaux said his group was going to the Seafair Torchlight Parade in downtown Seattle, and tried to do the right thing by taking the train and avoiding downtown parking.</p> <p>Efficient transit is especially vital this weekend because of Saturday night's parade and roadwork on southbound Interstate 5 in Sodo. Cunningham called the incident "a significant impact to southbound trains."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Summer heat: prison cells 100deg. in South
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/k7bbba/prison-cells-can-reach-nearly-150-degrees-in-the-south
GIST	<p>Summers in the U.S. have been getting hotter year over year—and more dangerous as a result.</p> <p>But very few Americans have to face the heat with next to no relief options like the country's incarcerated population. Record-breaking temperatures can quickly become a health risk for the largely Black and Brown incarcerated population, particularly in the South.</p> <p>Little has been done by U.S. prisons in recent years to combat their readiness for heat waves. In Texas, where just 20 percent of prison units in the state have air conditioning, cells regularly reach temperatures as high as 110 degrees, with some cells getting as hot as 149 degrees, according to a study released by the Texas A&M University Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center earlier this month. In Florida, where just 24 percent of prison units have air conditioning, prison reform activists recently told the Orlando Sentinel that cell temperatures exceed 100 degrees. And in Arizona, where temperatures as high as 120 degrees can result in the cancellation of flights, inmates were left outside to bear the brunt of it.</p> <p>Texas, Arizona, and Florida are just three of 13 states that don't have universal air conditioning in their prisons, according to the Prison Policy Initiative: Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky,</p>

Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Without air conditioning, which is mandatory in order to live comfortably in many of these states, inmates exposed to the heat for long periods of time can suffer from potentially fatal heat strokes, according to the Initiative, as well as adverse effects on their kidneys, liver, heart, and brains.

The effects that the grueling conditions of these prisons can have are made worse by the mandatory labor many of its inhabitants are forced to take part in, Jamila Johnson, deputy director for the Promise of Justice Initiative in Louisiana told VICE News.

“In the course of their day, there are people who are fully working in the fields, they’re working in prison enterprises, working to make tags for license plates, doing other manufacturing work, working in kitchens,” Johnson said. “Those are our grueling jobs in the best of conditions.”

Working through the heat has always been a risk for American laborers. Between 2011 and 2019, at least 344 American workers died of heat stress in the U.S, according to the [U.S. Department of Labor](#), with the agency adding that the figure is likely underreported.

But these figures don’t account for prison workers, who are subjected to similar kinds of work, but aren’t considered employed. In states like Louisiana, prisoners are working for wages [as low as 4 cents an hour](#) in the hot sun. But whereas unincarcerated workers are more free to take time off or alleviate themselves from the heat with cold water or breaks in the shade, incarcerated workers aren’t afforded the same basic rights.

“They get a disciplinary write-up, which could stop them from being able to get parole or request their change of job that would get them out of the field or to a spot that might be safer,” Johnson said. “Not subjecting yourself to the brutal heat is a decision that comes with incredible consequences not seen in the outside world.”

Johnson said what’s happening in Louisiana, which is projected to see one of the nation’s [largest increases in annual heat waves](#), is representative of what’s happening in other state prisons facing the heat crisis.

As is the case for most issues regarding prisons in the U.S., this issue disproportionately affects Black and brown Americans since they make up a majority of those serving long-term prison sentences.

“If you want to know what climate racism looks like, the lack of care about installing air conditioning in prisons is a real example of that at its most concrete,” Johnson said. “People acknowledge that prisons are inherently unsafe places and therefore don’t care as much about the ways that they could be made safer.”

The heat can impact more than just a person’s physical health. A 2019 [study on solitary confinement in Louisiana conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice](#) found that self-harm incidents for those in restrictive prison housing spiked in June and don’t level off until September.

There have been legal efforts by the incarcerated to push for proper air conditioning in U.S. prisons, nearly all of them arguing these harsh conditions go against their 8th Amendment rights to not be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment.

But despite solid cases, these prisoners faced severe legal pushback. In 2014, inmates at the Wallace Pack Unit prison, located 70 miles northwest of Houston, sued the Texas Department of Criminal Justice over the lack of air conditioning, saying in their lawsuit that nearly two dozen prisoners died of heat stroke in the last 20 years. It wasn’t until 2018, after the state nearly doubled the cost it would take to simply install ACs to fight the lawsuit, that a U.S. District Judge, [ruled in the inmates’ favor](#).

In Louisiana, inmates on death row at Angola State Penitentiary sued the state Department of Public Safety and Corrections for the conditions. Instead of paying the estimated \$225,000 it would cost to install AC (before engineering and operating fees), the state [spent over \\$1 million](#) fighting the lawsuit for three

	years. The state eventually got the case dismissed in 2019 , as the 5th Circuit Court ruled there were other remedies such as cool showers, ice machines, and access to cold water.
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HEADLINE	07/29 World's biggest cannabis scam unraveling
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/7k88by/juicyfields-cannabis-scam
GIST	<p>The two Lamborghinis were impossible to ignore. Printed with the company logo, the company JuicyFields had parked them in front of a hotel in Barcelona when the international cannabis industry gathered there for a conference in March. The message was clear: this is where the real money is made.</p> <p>JuicyFields, a firm originally based in Germany but which moved to Amsterdam earlier this year, promoted itself as a business that would make investors, named “e-growers”, rich by putting their savings into legal cannabis plantations. But now, JuicyFields is looking like being the biggest cannabis industry scam of all time.</p> <p>Since mid-July, investors have no longer been able to log into their customer accounts. Up to 500,000 investors – that's how many there were at last count, according to JuicyFields - could be affected. The potential damage could be somewhere between tens of millions and several billion euros.</p> <p>JuicyFields had a large presence in the Spanish-speaking world. Spanish law firm Martinez-Bianco is representing 1,400 people who say they have lost money due to JuicyFields. It used data from crypto-analysis platform Etherscan to estimate that more than €5 billion (around £4.2 billion) passed through JuicyFields' crypto wallets. In Spain alone, Martinez-Bianco estimates 28,000 people have been affected, with some investors suspected to have lost the maximum of €180,000 (£150,000).</p> <p>The then Berlin-based company went online in early 2020 with its self-described “cannabis crowdgrowing platform”. JuicyFields’ marketing team used messaging app Telegram, small news sites and online forums specialising in cryptocurrencies to spread the news: people would be able to gain financial stakes in cannabis farms by making investments of anything between €50 (£42) and €180,000 (£150,000).</p> <p>To do this, they had to create a user account through which all transactions would take place. Three months later, they were told, after the medical cannabis was cultivated, harvested and sold, returns of up to 66 percent could be reaped.</p> <p>On JuicyFields' online platform, users from Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America could not only watch their plants grow, but also their fortunes. In several Telegram groups, the JuicyFields community reported profits that the company had paid out to them – simply as a bank transfer or in the form of cryptocurrency.</p> <p>This continued until July 11 this year, when Telegram chat groups filled up with concerned messages from investors who suddenly could no longer access their JuicyFields accounts. Almost at the same time, JuicyFields employees had announced a strike over unpaid salaries.</p> <p>As disquiet around JuicyFields grew, the company – sponsors of the Berlin cannabis fair, “Mary Jane”, which took place in the same week in mid-July, seemed to retreat into silence. JuiceFields organisers became unreachable. The company's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram channels are now no longer accessible, and on YouTube all content gradually disappeared.</p> <p>According to media reports, JuicyFields may have mimicked a Ponzi scheme, by using investor money to pay off other investors in order to generate euphoric customer feedback. This helped the company to build a winning image, which it spread vigorously, not only with sports cars, but also via social media and influencers, online advertising and trade fairs. The buzz overshadowed some voices that cast doubts around JuicyFields' fantastic profit announcements. Yet there were warning signs.</p>

In May, the Spanish national financial commission (CNMV) had placed JuicyFields on a list of companies that are not authorised to conduct investment business. And the German Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin) had issued an official warning about JuicyFields in March. In June, it banned the company from [operating in Germany](#) because JuicyFields had broken the law by not publishing the necessary financial literature on its investment offers. At that time, JuicyFields had already moved its headquarters from Berlin to Amsterdam.

Despite all this, business apparently continued. As journalists from German state broadcaster [Deutsche Welle](#) report, they were able to continue to invest virtually in hemp plants even after the ban in Germany. [World News](#)

Did these cannabis plants ever exist? Those who know the truth, JuicyField's bosses, have gone off the radar. The company's original CEO and founder American Alan Glanse, who [denied](#) any responsibility for the exit scam, resigned at the beginning of the year. South African Willem van der Merwe, listed as the new CEO, is said to have [resigned](#) mid-July.

According to research by German financial magazine [Finanztest](#), the trail of those behind JuicyFields led to a Swiss holding company and members of a German aristocratic family. The Spanish publication, *El País Financiero*, found a group of three men with Russian passports was behind JuicyFields, a story [backed up](#) by Glanse, the former CEO.

The JuicyFields saga comes not long after Ruja Ignatova, a German-Bulgarian, known as the Cryptoqueen, was put on the [FBI's list of most wanted fugitives](#) for allegedly relieving investors of 4 billion dollars in a crypto currency investment scam, OneCoin.

Now, the Berlin public prosecutor's office is investigating Juicy Grow GmbH and its managing director. According to Finanztest, the German Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin) has set a penalty payment of €1 million against Juicy Holdings B.V.

"There's a huge demand for cannabis legalisation and investments in Europe," said Charlotte Bowyer, Head of Advisory at UK-based cannabis industry consultants Hanway Associates. "But part of the problem is a lack of good information. Many investors can't tell a good cannabis investment from a bad one.

"Public companies are heavily regulated in what they can and can't say to unsophisticated investors. Currently there aren't many on Europe's stock exchanges to satisfy this demand."

Germany is set to become one of the biggest legal weed markets in the world after its new government announced plans to legalise recreational cannabis [last year](#). In May, Minister of Health Karl Lauterbach announced the government will draw up a bill by the end of 2022, and it is expected to become law by the end of 2023.

Meanwhile, a cryptic statement has been published on JuicyFields' website, juicyfields.io. In order to register for refunds, it states, users should send them a selfie video with their official ID card. This though, with its obvious risks, has the air of being a scam itself.

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HEADLINE	07/29 Prison drone contraband deliveries rampant
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/drone-contraband-deliveries-prisons-united-states/
GIST	ON AUGUST 26, 2019 , at 1:30 am in rural Georgia, two men stopped a car 100 yards away from Telfair State Prison, a closed-custody facility that backs into a forest of cypresses and oaks. Inside a duffel bag, the men had a 1.9-pound Storm Drone 4, a Radio Link UAS controller, a Spektrum video monitor with DVR headset, 75 grams of loose tobacco, four rounds of loose ammunition, and 14 cell phones.

Their plan, plotted out for over a month, was simple: To fly the drone over the prison's walls, where it would drop the payload and soar off, undetected, into the night. But when they switched off the car lights, they caught the attention of deputies from the Telfair County Sheriff's office stationed nearby.

One of the deputies approached the vehicle to question the driver, who told him he was with two other men. Later identified as Nicolas Lo and Cheikh Hassane Toure, the men, who had fled to the woods, were taken into custody, and later indicted in the US District Court on grand jury charges for a plot to smuggle contraband into the prison. They were sentenced to 12 months in federal prison after pleading guilty to their roles in the scheme.

Lo and Toure were two of the first US federal prosecutions of noncommercial aircraft pilots for the charge of "serving or attempting to serve as an airman without an airman's certificate," a violation of Title 49 of US code, which requires anyone operating an unmanned aircraft "for compensation or hire" to hold the certificate.

Nicholas' brother George Lo, who had agreed in one of 42 recorded phone calls from the prison (where he was serving a state sentence for armed robbery) to pay "four bands"—or \$4,000—for the contraband and delivery fee, also pleaded guilty.

He admitted to "owning an unregistered drone that was operated, attempted to be operated, or allowed to be operated by another person," violating a federal law that requires owners of uncrewed aircraft weighing 0.55 pounds or more to register their drones prior to flight. George Lo was also charged with a 12-month sentence on top of previous convictions, amounting to a 175-year term.

These prosecutions speak to a broader federal effort to crack down on an escalating number of drone contraband drops that have drawn the attention of the [US Department of Justice](#), the European Commission's counterterrorism unit, and [Interpol](#), and that are worrying prison officials, politicians, and law enforcement agents around the globe.

Drones are dropping [drugs and cell phones](#) in prison yards. They're brazenly [dangling contraband from fishing lines](#) in front of smashed prison windows or crashing into recreational areas, sometimes midday. They've [dropped wire cutters](#) used in bold prison escapes involving body doubles and leading to manhunts. They've [sparked prison riots](#), [crash landed on an elementary school](#) roof, and supplied weapons like [ceramic knives, scissors](#), and [guns \(perhaps even to the Italian Mafia\)](#) that put inmates and correctional officers at heightened risk.

France's justice minister [speculates](#) they were used before the helicopter escape of murder convict Redoine Faïd to run reconnaissance on the grounds of Reau Prison, in the south of Paris. And in one of the more astounding examples, UK law enforcement [prosecuted](#) a drone gang for a two-year plot coordinated across at least five prisons and involving 49 illegal drone flights and contraband worth up to \$1.34 million—a plot that only came to light because field cameras set up to record wildlife tipped off police, the [BBC reported](#).

Arguably, one of the biggest threats posed by drones is the cell phones they're delivering, devices that can be worth several thousand dollars inside prisons, where they allow inmates to maintain vast criminal enterprises on the internet, says Cain Smith, a city attorney for Statesboro, Georgia, who represented Nicolas Lo in the case.

A 2016 grand jury indictment in the Southern District of Georgia suggests just how elaborate these schemes can be. Daniel Roger Alo, who goes by the street aliases "Marco Polo," "Boss Man," "Lo," and "Uh No," allegedly led a drug ring that smuggled cell phones into a Georgia prison and used them, along with PayPal accounts, Green Dot prepaid cards, and Western Union money transfers to coordinate methamphetamine distribution across Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia. Drones delivered the cell phones, but the meth never entered the prison: It was being sold outside, the indictment charges, by an unlikely confederation of gangs and drug cartels.

“What’s interesting about the gang affiliation is just the breadth of them,” says Smith, who represented one of the midlevel conspirators, a man named Oronde Pender, in the case. “I mean, you’re talking Bloods, Gangster Disciples, which are African American gangs, Ghostface Gangsters [who are [primarily white supremacists](#)], and the Sinaloa Cartel, which is, obviously, an international Mexican cartel. It just shows how interconnected, though ideologically opposed, a lot of these gangs are, acting in concert to further the distribution of methamphetamines.”

The methamphetamine distribution plot is far more sophisticated than the Telfair County escapade, what Smith calls “amateur backwoods Georgia pines shit.” They share the intent of eluding security and distancing perpetrators from their crimes. Ranging from a few hundred dollars to \$5,000 or more, drones by manufacturers like DJI, Autel, and Parrot are capable of flying 400 feet above ground, a half-mile or more from their operators (depending on weather, weight, and battery life), while carrying payloads of up to 15 pounds, says Bryan Stirling, director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections.

Prisons, generally speaking, weren’t designed to defend against such threats. “Since the time of castles and moats we’ve had to deal with two-dimensional perimeter protection,” says Mary-Lou Smulders, chief marketing officer at the counterdrone company DEDrone. “We built fences, we built moats, we put guards around the outside. This is sort of a new threat vector for the same issues that people have had ... Only now you’ve got a \$1,500 drone that a 10-year-old can pull out of the box and fly.”

It’s not children who are committing these heists, of course. It’s people running jobs on the inside and the outside. Internet-connected cell phones and electronic money transfers through Green Dot prepaid cards, or mobile payment services like Cash App—often with an advance cut to outside conspirators who receive the balance on delivery—make them much easier to coordinate.

“Frankly, prisoners for the longest time were inward looking,” says Stirling. “All of a sudden, smuggling contraband became very lucrative for folks smuggling it from the outside, and also for prisoners and prison gangs to distribute drugs and contraband inside.”

If the yard is dry, a pound of tobacco product can go for anywhere from \$800 to \$4,000, a flip phone for about \$1,500, and an Android or iPhone for up to \$3,000, says David Simon, a major at the Lee County Sheriff’s Office of South Carolina. And the shadow market for drone contraband appears to be growing. In South Carolina, facilities have recorded 424 drone sightings since 2017 and seen contraband drops increase dramatically over the years, with 29 recorded in 2017, 166 in 2021, and 108 through May of this year.

Jeffrey Wilkins, the president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, says in the 49 institutions the union represents drones are seen, or detected by radar systems, daily. Medium security facilities with operable windows and easily punctured mesh screens are more or less tollbooths. “The technology is so advanced that they can nearly GPS the thing right to their cell window. They just reach out of their cell windows and take it from the drones.”

Once inside, drugs and weapons are sparking routine outbreaks of violence between inmates and against correctional officers. About twice weekly, Wilkins told me, a national monitoring center receives a call from a prison where a correctional officer can’t finish a shift because of an injury that requires medical attention.

“The different kinds of weapons that we’re seeing now are things that we’ve never seen before, like ceramic blades, knives, brass knuckles,” Wilkins says. “The amount of drugs that have been seized is just incredible.”

According to data from the Correctional Service of Canada that Wilkins shared with WIRED, out of approximately 12,000 inmates in medium and maximum security institutions, assault incidents rose 9.6 percent from April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, and jumped a staggering 185 percent in structured intervention units that house inmates more secluded from the general population. Meanwhile, seizures of

cell phones, calling cards, cell phone chargers, and SIM cards across all institutions rose from roughly 100 to 1,100 between 2017 and 2021.

The growing severity of the problem, in the US and internationally, is likely part of the reason Judge Dudley Bowen of the Southern District of Georgia sentenced Lo and Toure to twelve-month prison terms, over the advisory guidelines of their plea agreements.

“What’s important for others to know,” he says at Toure’s sentencing hearing, “is that on the one hand, if I try to get nine or ten cell phones inside the prison, I’ll just get probation for three years, maybe have to go down to the Salvation Army and make up some beds or something like that. Or, if I try to do that very same thing, it looks like my option is going to be federal prison.”

Conveniently, in this instance, the perpetrators were not especially discreet, Estes says. Calls over a recorded prison line described incriminating details of the plot: a screenshot of a Google Maps image of the target location, practice flights, dates and times of aborted trips, the installation of an aftermarket release device, and plans for electronic money exchange. But if those same calls had been made over a smuggled-in cell phone, they may not have been detected at all.

Jurisdictional boundaries in legal authority made the offense procedurally difficult to prosecute—which is part of the reason the charges appear so flimsy. The act of smuggling contraband into a US state facility is not a federal offense, possessing tobacco or cell phones outside a prison is not illegal, and although federal prisons are regulated by [Federal Aviation Administration no-fly zones](#), only [a handful of US states](#) and municipalities have laws against flying drones over state, county, and local correctional institutions. While Georgia law requires a [penalty of one to five years in prison](#) for any contraband delivery to prison, delivering contraband to a state prison is not a federal crime—hence, the rather circuitous drone charges.

“These are not easy cases,” Estes says. “It’s the issue of proof that makes them difficult.”

In the absence of stiff federal deterrents for attempted drone deliveries to state institutions, many correctional institutions are turning to counterdrone technologies to try to catch drones and their operators in the act, but these are “no silver bullet,” says Casey Flanagan, a former technician for the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s counter UAS program, who, in May, founded his own counterdrone consulting and training company, AeroVigilance.

Citing [a study](#) from the Bard College Center for the Study of the Drone, Flanagan says more than [200 systems, produced by 155 counterdrone manufacturers in 33 countries around the world](#), use a mix of technologies—electro-optical and infrared cameras, radar units, radio frequency, and acoustic sensors—to identify and track drones.

But each has its own shortcomings. Cameras don’t work well in dense urban areas with a limited sight range. Radar systems are often binary and can mistake a bird for a drone. Radio frequency detection units that operate on 2.4- and 5.8-GHz bands, the same signal frequencies used by Wi-Fi technologies, can misidentify drones for other devices. Geofences only stop drones they are programmed to recognize.

Plus, counterdrone systems are expensive. In South Carolina, after an [\\$8 million, 50-foot high golf net](#) at Lee Correctional proved ineffective against drones, they invested \$240,000 in a drone detection system, which adds to a fleet of drones equipped with high resolution cameras and infrared technology that pilots use to conduct surveillance over the state’s 21 institutions.

Smulder says the company’s counterdrone technology, active at 50 prisons around the world, addresses many of these technical limitations, with a multilayered system capable of tracking the radio frequency signals of 200 drone models. Sensors triangulated at strategic locations on prison grounds detect, identify, and locate drones over the airspace. Machine learning helps analyze patterns—incursion locations, time of day, flight paths.

“Everybody can do the basics of what we do: You can identify what kind of drone it is,” Smulder says. “Is it a good guy drone or a bad guy drone? Is it, you know, a DJI Mavic 2, or whatever it is? And that gives you indications around the payload and speed and range. You can track where the pilot is, where the drone is going, where it is now, and where it’s been as long as you’re doing it in a legal way.”

Alerts sent to computers in the security operations center of a prison or the mobile phones of corrections officers provide “situational awareness,” Smulder says. Prison operators can lock down a yard, ordering prisoners to their cells, so that correction officers can recover dropped contraband and prevent fights, such as the one that [broke out](#) at Mansfield Correctional Institution in Ohio. In some instances, information stored on seized drones—GPS data, images, serial numbers—can be used to track down pilots.

What prisons can’t do, however, at least in the United States, is shoot down drones, use a projectile or a net to capture them, or break the radio frequency link between the drone and its controller by jamming or spoofing the signals. [Federal laws](#), such as the Pen/Trap Statute and Wiretap Act, and statutes that give the Federal Aviation Administration authority over airspace, limit the use of mitigation technologies to four agencies: the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and Department of Energy.

These laws effectively tie the hands of prison authorities at state facilities, Stirling says. When a detection system sends an alert to a security operations center or mobile device that a drone is within a half-mile of the prison, they can lock down the recreation yard, sending inmates to their cells while they search the grounds for fallen drones. But they can do little else to stop them. “Our technology is kind of like a beta model, a fire alarm versus a fire extinguisher or sprinkler system,” Stirling says.

The US is not an outlier when it comes to its restrictive counterdrone laws, but it does lag behind several countries when it comes to the adoption of signal jamming, says Lars Huybrechts, a chief inspector for the Belgian Federal Police and directorate-general of migration and home affairs for the European Commission. France allows police to use jammers, Romania does not, and Belgium is considering laws that would allow police to use jamming in certain instances, such as when demining an improvised explosive device.

“Many prisons already have certain jamming in place, but it’s mostly for cell phones and very limited, of course, to a small range,” Huybrechts says. “I see them quickly building up to probably drone jamming, if it’s allowed.”

Back in the US, the White House recently announced a [Domestic Counter-UAS National Action Plan](#) that Smulder says appears to signal a national policy shift toward a more aggressive counterdrone posture. If adopted by Congress, the recommendations would clarify standards of legal and illegal drone use and stiffen criminal penalties to deter illegal drone surveillance and assaults. Crucially, it would enact a pilot program to allow selected law enforcement agencies to mitigate malicious drone use.

“So if you see a drone coming that is carrying a pouch, or has some kind of payload, before it gets over the yard and either kamikaze-land itself and give itself to God or release its payload, you would be allowed to mitigate. Take it down,” Smulder said.

At the same time, the Federal Communications Commission is [weighing a measure](#) that would allow state prison officials to capture the 15- to-17-digit International Mobile Equipment Identity of contraband cell phones and send that data to mobile carriers, who could shut them down.

These are the kind of policy shifts Stirling—who advocated for cell signal jamming in [a 2017 FCC hearing](#)—would like to see move forward. Until then, Sheriff Simon may be dealing with swarming drones and suspicious activity outside Lee Correctional Institution in Bishopville, South Carolina, the way he has in the past: by sending deputies on nighttime perimeter patrols to surveil the grounds and, in some cases, calling on a pair of sniffing bloodhounds to chase suspects deep into the woods.

	“As long as they’ve got cell phones they can utilize without being jammed, it’s going to be business as usual, operating their enterprises from where there are,” Simon says. “I am so afraid they are going to get some weapons in there, and what goes in will come out. My fear is they may be planning a mass exit or breakout.”
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HEADLINE	07/29 France: firefighter started region wildfires
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/29/firefighter-chasing-adrenaline-hit-started-french-wildfires-say-prosecutors
GIST	<p>A firefighter from the south of France is responsible for a series of wildfires in the region which he started in a quest for adrenaline, French authorities have said.</p> <p>The man, a volunteer firefighter from the Hérault region, was arrested on Wednesday, regional prosecutors said.</p> <p>The case of the man called the “pyromaniac fireman” by French media has sparked a keen interest in France, which was shocked by a swathe of wildfires during last week’s heatwave that forced the evacuation of thousands of people.</p> <p>Montpellier prosecutor Fabrice Belargent said in a statement that the man had admitted starting fires with a lighter on 26 May, 21 July and most recently over the night of 26-27 July.</p> <p>“Asked about his motive, he declared that he had done this in order to provoke an intervention by the fire brigade to save him from an oppressive family environment and because of the excitement these interventions caused him,” said Belargent.</p> <p>“Adrenaline he called it – these are his own words,” said the prosecutor. “He also said he had a need for social recognition.”</p> <p>The man, who is in his 30s but has not been named, works full-time as a forester, with preventing fires one of his primary responsibilities.</p> <p>His lawyer, Marie Bar, told BFM TV that under questioning the man had “expressed very strong regret and above all a strong sentiment of shame”.</p> <p>She confirmed he had been remanded in custody by an investigating judge ahead of trial.</p> <p>“He apologised to the ... firemen who he works with as he calls them his big family. This is someone who is very devoted to his work,” she said.</p> <p>“He finds it hard to explain. In a way he is relieved to have been arrested. He explains it as an addiction.”</p> <p>If convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison and a €150,000 (£125,000) fine.</p> <p>“It’s disgusting to have within the organisation this type of individual,” former fire brigade colonel Ludovic Pinganaud told BFM, adding that out of 200,000 volunteer firefighters in France there were just “some sick people” addicted to fires.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Feds: Russian sowed propaganda in US
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/29/us/russian-indictment-florida.html
GIST	<p>MIAMI — The Russian man with a trim beard and patterned T-shirt appeared in a Florida political group’s YouTube livestream in March, less than three weeks after his country had invaded Ukraine, and falsely claimed that what had happened was not an invasion.</p>

“I would like to address the free people around the world to tell you that Western propaganda is lying when they say that Russia invaded Ukraine,” he said through an interpreter.

His name was Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov, and he described himself as a “human rights activist.”

But federal authorities say he was working for the Russian government, orchestrating a yearslong influence campaign to use American political groups to spread Russian propaganda and interfere with U.S. elections. On Friday, the Justice Department revealed that it had charged Mr. Ionov with conspiring to have American citizens act as illegal agents of the Russian government.

Mr. Ionov, 32, who lives in Moscow and is not in custody, is accused of recruiting three political groups in Florida, Georgia and California from December 2014 through March, providing them with financial support and directing them to publish Russian propaganda. On Friday, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions against him.

David Walker, the top agent in the F.B.I.’s Tampa field office, called the allegations “some of the most egregious and blatant violations we’ve seen by the Russian government in order to destabilize and undermine trust in American democracy.”

In 2017 and 2019, Mr. Ionov supported the campaigns of two candidates for local office in St. Petersburg, Fla., where one of the American political groups was based, according to a 24-page indictment. He wrote to a Russian official in 2019 that he had been “consulting every week” on one of the campaigns, the indictment said.

“Our election campaign is kind of unique,” a Russian intelligence officer wrote to Mr. Ionov, adding, “Are we the first in history?” Mr. Ionov later referred to the candidate, who was not named in the indictment, as the one “whom we supervise.”

In 2016, according to the indictment, Mr. Ionov paid for the St. Petersburg group to conduct a four-city protest tour supporting a “Petition on Crime of Genocide Against African People in the United States,” which the group had previously submitted to the United Nations at his direction.

“The goal is to heighten grievances,” Peter Strzok, a former top F.B.I. counterintelligence official, said of the sort of behavior Mr. Ionov is accused of carrying out. “They just want to fund opposing forces. It’s a means to encourage social division at a low cost. The goal is to create strife and division.”

The Russian government has a long history of trying to sow division in the U.S., in particular during the 2016 presidential campaign. Mr. Strzok said the Russians were known to plant stories with fringe groups in an effort to introduce disinformation into the media ecosystem.

Federal investigators described Mr. Ionov as the founder and president of the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia and said it was funded by the Russian government. They said he worked with at least three Russian officials and in conjunction with the F.S.B., a Russian intelligence agency.

The indictment issued on Friday did not name the U.S. political groups, their leaders or the St. Petersburg candidates, who were identified only as Unindicted Co-conspirator 3 and Unindicted Co-conspirator 4. And Mr. Ionov is the only person who has been charged in the case.

But leaders of the Uhuru Movement, which is based in St. Petersburg and part of the African People’s Socialist Party, said that their office and chairman’s home had been raided by federal agents on Friday morning as part of the investigation.

“They handcuffed me and my wife,” the chairman, Omali Yeshitela, said on Facebook Live from outside the group’s new headquarters in St. Louis. He said he did not take Russian government money but would not be “morally opposed” to accepting funds from Russians or “anyone else who wants to support the struggles for Black people.”

The indictment said that Mr. Ionov paid for the founder and chairman of the St. Petersburg group — identified as Unindicted Co-conspirator 1 — to travel to Moscow in 2015. Upon his return, the indictment said, the chairman said in emails with other group leaders that Mr. Ionov wanted the group to be “an instrument” of the Russian government, which did not “disturb us.”

“Yes, I have been to Russia,” Mr. Yeshitela said in his Facebook Live appearance on Friday, without addressing when he went and who paid for his trip. He added that he has also been to other countries, including South Africa and Nicaragua.

In St. Petersburg, Akilé Anai of the Uhuru Movement said in a news conference that federal authorities had seized her car and other personal property.

She called the investigation an attack on the Uhuru Movement, which has long been a presence in St. Petersburg but has had little success in local politics.

“We can have relationships with whoever we want to,” she said, adding that the Uhuru Movement has made no secret of backing Russia in the war in Ukraine. “We are in support of Russia.”

Ms. Anai ran for the City Council in 2017 and 2019 as Eritha “Akilé” Cainion. She received about 18 percent of vote in the 2019 runoff election.

Mr. Ionov is also accused of directing an unidentified political group in Sacramento that pushed for California’s secession from the United States. The indictment said that he helped fund a 2018 protest in the State Capitol and encouraged the group’s leader to try to get into the governor’s office.

And Mr. Ionov is accused of directing an unidentified political group in Atlanta, paying for its members to travel to San Francisco this year to protest at the headquarters of a social media company that restricted pro-Russian posts about the invasion of Ukraine. Mr. Ionov even provided designs for protest signs, according to the indictment.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February, the indictment said that Mr. Ionov told his Russian intelligence associates that he had asked the St. Petersburg group to support Russia in the “information war unleashed” by the West.

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HEADLINE	07/30 Haiti gang’s increasing capital chokehold
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/30/world/americas/haiti-government-gangs.html
GIST	<p>Gangs are increasing their chokehold on Haiti’s capital, using bulldozers to raze entire neighborhoods, overwhelming poorly armed police and taking their violence to within blocks of the seat of government.</p> <p>While Haitians have endured relentless bloodshed and tragedy for years, the escalation of lawlessness in recent weeks and the government’s inability to exert control has terrified the nation.</p> <p>In just a nine-day period in July, more than 470 people were killed, injured or missing as a result of gang warfare in Cité Soleil, the country’s largest slum, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>Government agencies and ministries have urged employees to stay home as gangs expand their territory and are now close to the presidential palace, interior ministry, the central bank and the national penitentiary, where hungry prisoners are threatening to riot, officials warn.</p> <p>In Cité Soleil, home to about 300,000 people, gangs fighting for control are using bulldozers to topple homes, gang-rape women and girls, and kill at random, according to interviews with residents.</p>

One woman, Wislande Pierre, said she lost nearly everything during a single day, one of over 3,000 people who fled Cité Soleil in July, according to the U.N. The gang clashes started in Ms. Pierre's neighborhood before spreading to downtown Port-au-Prince, the capital.

Ms. Pierre was home at about 5 a.m. when she said she was awakened by someone shouting, "Leave this place! You are all going to die! They are coming!"

The distant sound of metal crunching under metal, gun shots and the roar of flames quickly followed. Ms. Pierre threw what she could into a backpack and fled as three bulldozers ripped through and obliterated her neighborhood and gang members set fire to what remained, details backed up in interviews with others who escaped and video footage.

But Ms. Pierre's sister Jona was not as lucky.

Jona had left her one-month-old infant daughter on her bed early that morning as she emptied the family's chamber pots on a nearby beach. Her husband was at work. Like many in Cité Soleil, Jona lives in a house made of metal sheets with no running water, the family relieving themselves in buckets.

For two days, Jona took shelter on the beach, in anguish over the fate of her child, but unable to return home while the gang warfare raged on.

Eventually, the fighting subsided and Jona rushed back, her hopes sinking as she passed flattened houses. Hers, miraculously, was left standing.

But there her daughter lay on the bed where Jona had left her, the baby's small body riddled with seven bullets, the metal sheet walls of her home offering no resistance to the gangs' ammunition.

By that time, the fighting had migrated to a nearby cemetery. Unable to give her daughter a dignified burial, Jona placed the body in an empty box of crackers, went down to the shores of Cité Soleil and buried her in the sand.

"We are still alive, but I cannot say we are alive," said Ms. Pierre, Jona's sister. "If this is life, what is hell?"

One gang, the G-9 Family and Allies run by a former policeman named Jimmy Chérizier, who is known as Barbecue, has gained control of more territory in Cité Soleil, wresting it away from a rival gang, the G-pèp.

In many ways, Mr. Chérizier embodies the reasons Haiti is where it is today: the country's political and business elites have supported competing gangs to achieve their own objectives, whittling away at any semblance of a functioning nation.

Mr. Chérizier is believed to be supported by political figures seeking to suppress protests or to force the people to vote a certain way. Haiti's big business families pay off his gang to advance their economic interests, including safe passage of their goods, which dock at Port-au-Prince's ports.

The ports are on the edge of Cité Soleil and since Haiti imports most of its food, fuel and other necessities, G-9 can effectively hold the entire country hostage by preventing goods that arrive at the port from being distributed by trucks.

The use of gangs by Haiti's political power brokers is not new. It was [a tool made popular by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide](#) during his second term, which started in 2001. Then, gangs were used mostly to suppress a rebellion against Mr. Aristide's rule that unfolded across Haiti.

Wislande Pierre grew up in Cité Soleil and remembers what life was like when the first gangs emerged. As a young girl, she could go out to buy ice cream, go to school, play in the streets until dark. The gangs

would warn residents if they needed to operate in their neighborhood, even urging the principal of her school to evacuate students and providing them safe passage home.

“Now the bandits don’t care, they will just open fire and shoot at you,” Ms. Pierre said, an assessment shared by two other residents of Cité Soleil who were interviewed after they fled. “It doesn’t matter who you are or what you’re doing.”

After Mr. Aristide fled Haiti in 2004 amid spiraling chaos, a U.N. peacekeeping mission was established that would patrol Cité Soleil, keeping gangs in check.

But over the years, the peacekeeping mission’s resources dwindled and it became embroiled in scandals, including a deadly cholera outbreak and widespread sexual misconduct that tainted peacekeepers before their mandate expired in 2019.

Since then, gangs have been on the rise as their political and business patrons strengthen their support to jockey for power, according to several Western diplomats and Haitian officials. Gangs smuggle in large quantities of weapons and ammunition through the country’s seaports, shipments facilitated by government officials.

Two senior State Department officials said that Washington was putting pressure on Haiti’s customs and ports officials to check incoming shipments, which likely contributed to several seizures of large caliber weapons and ammunition in recent weeks. But those shipments often leave from Florida, suggesting that U.S. customs officials also need to conduct more thorough inspections.

“During Aristide’s time, the gangs were not everywhere, they weren’t well equipped, they couldn’t confront the police, they didn’t go about kidnapping anyone they saw,” said Pierre Espérance, the executive director of the National Human Rights Defense Network, a Haitian organization that has testified before the United States Congress about the deteriorating situation. “They existed to keep Aristide in power.”

“Today, there is a total gangsterization of the country,” Mr. Espérance added. “Haiti’s big families are supporting the gangs to get what they want. They don’t want a stable situation, accountability or the ability of citizens to organize against them. Haitians are hostages.”

Because of human rights violations, the Haitian police are prevented from directly receiving arms and ammunition from the United States government.

Gangs, on the other hand, receive a steady flow of illegal weapons. State Department officials admit that the Haitian police are outgunned, their weapons often much older than the high-caliber weapons widely used by gangs.

The gangs have now become virtually impossible to contain. Over the spring, gang battles in some parts of the capital left some 100 people dead and [created 16,000 refugees as Haitians fled the violence](#), according to the U.N.

After increasing its control over Cité Soleil, Mr. Chérizier’s G-9 gang set its sights on downtown Port-au-Prince on July 24, engaging in fierce gun battles with Haiti’s police, often overpowering them.

The gang is now near a downtown area that includes the presidential palace, the ministry of interior, the national penitentiary, the central bank and other important state infrastructure.

The national penitentiary — overcrowded and struggling to feed its prisoners — houses several of Haiti’s most dangerous criminals, including gang leaders and some of the suspects involved in [the murder of the Haitian president, Jovenel Moïse, last year](#).

	<p>“Young people, women and men have been armed by political and private sector entities as the government turns a blind eye or are complicit at some of the highest official levels,” said Fritz Alphonse Jean, an opposition leader and former governor of the central bank. “The police are clearly overwhelmed and disoriented, lacking leadership from the government.”</p> <p>“It will only get worse,” he warned.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/30 Feds crackdown human trafficking King Co.
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/human-trafficking-is-there-in-plain-sight-every-single-day-feds-crackdown-on-human-trafficking
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Homeland Security Investigations are working to crack down on human trafficking in King County, not just by making arrests, but also by making connections.</p> <p>In King County alone, it is estimated that 500 to 700 children are forced into sex work every year.</p> <p>Victims can be as young as nine years old.</p> <p>On average, officials with Homeland Security Investigations say 300 people buy sex along Aurora Avenue in King County every day.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, I think our community is getting desensitized to it. And, you know, that's concerning. We should never be desensitized to the fact that our population, our community members, are being trafficked right in front of us," said Special Agent Jayme McFarland with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Seattle.</p> <p>McFarland and a small team are walking along problem spots in King County, like Aurora Avenue, handing out bags to women who may be victims of trafficking.</p> <p>Inside the bags are daily essentials like lotion and mouth wash, but the bags also include resources and contact information to help victims escape.</p> <p>"These women can't get out. And a lot of times, people aren't thinking, either, about the fact that a lot of people on this street, or online that are having ads posted of them, are minors. They're children," said McFarland</p> <p>For HSI, trafficking has been a focus for a while, but just within the last year this dedicated team has been working solely on the issue.</p> <p>"There is no such thing as a juvenile prostitute there is only a human trafficking victim," said Robert Hammer.</p> <p>Hammer is the special agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations across the Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>He says so far this year HSI has made 70 trafficking arrests.</p> <p>"We've almost doubled the number of arrests that we've made, because we're uncovering turn, after turn, these organizations that are exploiting and profiting off of the trafficking victims," he said.</p> <p>By cracking down on the traffickers, and the people paying for sex work, as well as offering resources to the victims, HSI hopes they are shining a light on this very real issue in our community.</p> <p>"It's imperative that the community really understand what human trafficking is and the impacts it's having on the community every single day," said Hammer</p>
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HEADLINE	07/29 Auburn drive-by shooting injures 3
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/three-people-injured-drive-by-shooting/281-2fd25498-7cc4-40bd-9a17-3bb709e38389
GIST	<p>AUBURN, Wash. — Three people were injured in a drive-by shooting at Isaac Evans Park in Auburn, according to the Auburn Police Department (APD).</p> <p>Two of the patients are in critical condition and one had to be airlifted from the scene. The other was taken to Harborview Medical Center by ambulance. Authorities previously said both patients had to be airlifted.</p> <p>The third patient was taken to a local hospital by ambulance.</p> <p>Witnesses said there were no issues at the park before the shooting started, according to APD.</p> <p>Police did not have information about what led up to the shooting.</p>
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